

THE EXPOSITORS' LIBRARY





BV 4205 .E96 v.45
Shepherd, Ambrose, 1854-
1915.

Bible studies in living
subjects

**BIBLE STUDIES IN LIVING
SUBJECTS**

THE EXPOSITOR'S LIBRARY

First 50 Volumes. Cloth, 2/- net each

THE NEW EVANGELISM
Prof. Henry Drummond, F.R.S.E.

FELLOWSHIP WITH CHRIST
Rev. R. W. Dale, D.D., LL.D.

THE JEWISH TEMPLE AND THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH
Rev. R. W. Dale, D.D., LL.D.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS
Rev. R. W. Dale, D.D., LL.D.

THE EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS
Rev. R. W. Dale, D.D., LL.D.

THE EPISTLE OF JAMES
Rev. R. W. Dale, D.D., LL.D.

A GUIDE TO PREACHERS
Rev. Prin. A. E. Garvie, M.A., D.D.

MODERN SUBSTITUTES FOR CHRISTIANITY
Rev. P. McAdam Muir, D.D.

EPHESIAN STUDIES
Rt. Rev. Handley C. G. Moule, D.D.

PHILIPPIAN STUDIES
Rt. Rev. Handley C. G. Moule, D.D.

COLOSSIAN STUDIES
Rt. Rev. Handley C. G. Moule, D.D.

CHRIST IS ALL
Rt. Rev. Handley C. G. Moule, D.D.

THE LIFE OF THE MASTER
Rev. John Watson, D.D.

THE MIND OF THE MASTER
Rev. John Watson, D.D.

HEROES AND MARTYRS OF FAITH
Professor A. S. Peake, D.D.

THE TEACHING OF JESUS CONCERNING HIMSELF
Rev. Prof. James Stalker, M.A., D.D.

STUDIES OF THE PORTRAIT OF CHRIST
Vol. I. Rev. George Matheson, D.D.

STUDIES OF THE PORTRAIT OF CHRIST
Vol. II. Rev. George Matheson, D.D.

THE FACT OF CHRIST
Rev. P. Carnegie Simpson, D.D.

THE CROSS IN MODERN LIFE
Rev. J. G. Greenhough, M.A.

THE UNCHANGING CHRIST
Rev. Alex. McLaren, D.D., D.LITT.

THE GOD OF THE AMEN
Rev. Alex. McLaren, D.D., D.LITT.

THE ASCENT THROUGH CHRIST
Rev. Principal E. Griffith Jones, B.A.

STUDIES ON THE OLD TESTAMENT
Professor F. Godet, D.D.

STUDIES ON THE NEW TESTAMENT
Professor F. Godet, D.D.

STUDIES ON ST. PAUL'S EPISTLES
Professor F. Godet, D.D.

CHRISTIANITY IN THE MODERN WORLD
Rev. D. S. Cairns, M.A.

ISRAEL'S IRON AGE
Rev. Marcus Dods, D.D.

THE CITY OF GOD
Rev. A. M. Fairbairn, M.A., D.D., LL.D.

CHRIST'S SERVICE OF LOVE
Rev. Prof. Hugh Black, M.A., D.D.

HUMANITY AND GOD
Rev. Samuel Chadwick.

THE WORK OF CHRIST
Rev. Principal P. T. Forsyth, D.D.

SIDELIGHTS FROM PATMOS
Rev. George Matheson, D.D.

THE TEACHING OF JESUS
Rev. George Jackson, B.A.

THE MIRACLES OF OUR LORD
Rev. Professor John Laidlaw, D.D.

THE CREATION STORY IN THE LIGHT OF
TO-DAY Rev. Charles Wenyon, M.D.

SAINTS AND SINNERS OF HEBREW HISTORY
Rev. J. G. Greenhough, M.A.

VIA SACRA
Rev. T. H. Darlow.

THE TRIAL AND DEATH OF JESUS CHRIST
Rev. Prof. James Stalker, M.A., D.D.

ASPECTS OF CHRIST
Rev. Principal W. B. Selbie, M.A.

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST
Rev. Professor James Orr, M.A., D.D.

THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE
Rev. John Watson, M.A., D.D.

CARDINAL VIRTUES
Rev. Canon W. C. E. Newbolt, M.A.

SPEAKING GOOD OF HIS NAME
Ven. Archdeacon Wilberforce, D.D.

LIVING THEOLOGY
Archbishop Benson.

HERITAGE OF THE SPIRIT
Bishop Mandell Creighton.

THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD
Bishop Walsham How.

A DEVOTIONAL COMMENTARY ON ST. PAUL'S EPISTLES TO THE COLOSSIANS AND THESSALONIANS
Joseph Parker, D.D.

A DEVOTIONAL COMMENTARY ON ST. PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS
Joseph Parker, D.D.

BIBLE STUDIES IN LIVING SUBJECTS
Rev. Ambrose Shepherd, D.D.

OTHER VOLUMES IN PREPARATION

LONDON: HODDER AND STOUGHTON.

THE EXPOSITOR'S LIBRARY

BIBLE STUDIES IN LIVING SUBJECTS

✓ BY

AMBROSE SHEPHERD, D.D.



HODDER AND STOUGHTON

LONDON NEW YORK TORONTO

I INSCRIBE THIS BOOK TO THE DEACONS
OF ELGIN PLACE CHURCH, GLASGOW; AND
WITH THIS BODY OF FAITHFUL MEN I
COUPLE THE NAME OF JAMES SPOTTISWOOD
ALEXANDER, ESQ., SECRETARY OF THE CHURCH

PREFACE

WHEN I yielded to the temptation to commit a number of sermons to print, I began to cast about in my mind how best to offer them to that public which as yet listens to sermons and occasionally reads them. It may be said that the most obvious way of handling such a difficulty is to make the sermons worth reading. Experience, however, does not always answer to the obvious. There are, I had almost said, endless sermons preached and published, the excellences of which are out of all proportion to the number of hearers and readers they secure. Whatever merit, if any, the sermons and addresses which follow may possess, they deal with *living* subjects, and for this reason, and in the hope that I may have said some useful things about them, I have selected and arranged them.

My first thought was to take some twenty-five to thirty of the more debated texts of Scripture, submit my exegesis of them, divide

and clothe them sufficiently to indicate their main treatment, and not to trouble the reader to toil through the length ordinarily expected in a sermon from the pulpits of our Free Churches. In the earlier sermons I have carried out this intention, but not in the later ones; and the graduation has been made according to my sense of the importance of the subject under discussion.

My approach to these subjects has been very largely on their ethical side. I myself am either a dogmatist or nothing in my mental and religious attitude to the great doctrines of the Christian Faith. But I refuse to admit that we need, in order to set forth the working truths of religion, another order of brain, or a different criterion of reason, from that which is accepted in the world we call practical. Whatever cuts against the grain of a healthy moral instinct may be what it may, but it is not Christian.

In my work upon these subjects, I have permitted myself the average amount of quotation. In some cases I have simply indicated the name of the writer to whom I am indebted for a particular thought. The reason for this is that I have quoted almost entirely from memory, and, whilst I am thankful for this

help, I have not wished to make those I have placed under tribute responsible for the form in which it appears.

I have again, as in my former books, to acknowledge my great indebtedness to the Rev. J. F. Shepherd, M.A., of Manchester, for his help with the proofs, and for many valuable suggestions as to emendations of expression.

CONTENTS

I

	PAGE
IF WE COULD BEGIN AGAIN	1

“Thou shalt . . . not turn again to go by the way that thou camest.” 1 KINGS xiii. 17.

“Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before.” PHILIPPIANS iii. 13.

II

MORNING : AND AFTER	11
-------------------------------	----

“In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand.”

ECCLESIASTES xi. 6.

“But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.”

ST. MARK xiii. 13.

III

THE MIND-CURE	23
-------------------------	----

“Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind.” ROMANS xii. 2.

IV

	PAGE
PROSPERITY AND PIETY	33

“Blessed is the man . . . whose delight is in the law of the Lord. . . . Whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.”

PSALM i. 2, 3.

V

ONE VOICE: TWO INTERPRETATIONS	41
--	----

“Then came there a voice from heaven. . . . The people therefore that stood by, and heard it, said that it thundered: Others said, An angel spake to him.”

ST. JOHN xii. 28, 29.

VI

THE TEST OF THE PATRIARCH'S FAITH	51
---	----

“And it came to pass . . . that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him . . . Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.”

GENESIS xxii. 1, 2.

VII

LOST BLESSINGS	63
--------------------------	----

“By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept when we remembered Zion.”

PSALM cxxxvii. 1.

CONTENTS

xiii

VIII

PAGE

AN ALL-INCLUSIVE PROMISE	71
------------------------------------	----

“For all things are yours ; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come ; all are yours ; and ye are Christ’s ; and Christ is God’s.”

1 CORINTHIANS iii. 21–23.

IX

WHEN WE CAN NEITHER FLY NOR RUN	81
---	----

“They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength ; they shall mount up with wings as eagles ; they shall run, and not be weary ; and they shall walk, and not faint.”

ISAIAH xl. 31.

X

WHY PRAY ?	89
----------------------	----

“For your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask Him.”

ST. MATTHEW vi. 8.

XI

SHOULD WE CONFESS ?	103
-------------------------------	-----

“And she said unto Elijah, What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God ? Art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance and to slay my son ?”

1 KINGS xvii. 18.

XII

	PAGE
THE INCARNATION OF INFLUENCE . . .	115

“For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.”

ROMANS xiv. 7.

XIII

THE HOUSE OF RIMMON . . .	127
---------------------------	-----

“In this thing the Lord pardon thy servant, that when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon; when I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing. And he (Elisha) said unto him, Go in peace.”

2 KINGS v. 18, 19.

“Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple.”

ST. LUKE xiv. 33.

XIV

THE ADDED TOUCH . . .	143
-----------------------	-----

“And I said unto her, Let me drink, I pray thee. And she made haste, and let down her pitcher, . . . and said, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also.”

GENESIS xxiv. 45, 46.

CONTENTS

XV

XV

	PAGE
GOD'S DREAMERS	157

“Get thee up into the top of Pisgah, and lift up thine eyes westward, and northward, and southward, and eastward, and behold it with thine eyes; for thou shalt not go over this Jordan.”
DEUTERONOMY iii. 27.

“Faith is the assurance of things hoped for; the giving substance to things not seen.”
HEBREWS xi. 1.

XVI

NEED POVERTY BE PERMANENT?	173
--------------------------------------	-----

“For ye have the poor always with you.”
ST. MATTHEW xxvi. 11.

XVII

JESUS: NOT JOHN	189
---------------------------	-----

“And King Herod heard of Him; (for His name was spread abroad :) and he said, That John the Baptist was risen from the dead, and therefore mighty works do shew forth themselves in him.”
ST. MARK vi. 14.

XVIII

CHRISTIANS AND THE THEATRE	203
--------------------------------------	-----

“All things” (that are lawful) “are lawful for me; but all lawful things are not expedient.”
1 CORINTHIANS vi. 12.

XIX

	PAGE
THE ROCK OF THE CHURCH	217

“And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church. . . . I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven.”

ST. MATTHEW xvi. 18, 19.

XX

CAN WE ESCAPE A FUTURE LIFE?	235
--	-----

“The memory of the just is blessed.”

PROVERBS x. 7.

“Yea, saith the Spirit, for their works do follow them.”

REVELATION xiv. 13.

“We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.”

2 CORINTHIANS v. 10.

XXI

THE PULPIT AND THE PRESS	259
------------------------------------	-----

Extracts from a paper read before the Institute of Journalists (Glasgow and West of Scotland Districts) Autumn Meetings.

XXII

AD CLERUM	281
---------------------	-----

“Is the Lord among us, or not?”

EXODUS xvii. 7.

IF WE COULD BEGIN AGAIN

“Thou shalt . . . not turn again to go by the way
that thou camest.”

1 KINGS xiii. 17.

“Forgetting those things which are behind, and reach-
ing forth unto those things which are before.”

PHILIPPIANS iii. 13.

I

IF WE COULD BEGIN AGAIN

THERE is hardly a human relationship that could exist a day were we all to take to thinking aloud about each other in any given five minutes of it. In some sense it is with the best in this relationship as it is with the worse—neither is written or spoken. Family life, patient service, quiet endurance, the resistance of temptation and brave acceptance of duty, these, the things that make history at its best, are never written in history. And the evil that goes into history, especially into personal history, who that can forget it would remember it, much more rehearse it in speech or write it in a book?

But granted that we could say, with some passable degree of candour, what it is we have done we would not do could we begin again, it probably needs but a little reflection to find

ourselves hard upon the grim query—are we so sure about this? Should we not? If we could begin again that we might avoid certain mistakes and wrong things done, only because of what they have cost and because we are having to foot the bill—well, I for one am glad that we cannot begin again. One great hope we have in much of our human folly is its stupidity; make it scientific and you make it hopeless.

And yet I know only too well that there is no more common form of unspoken thought than this: “Had I my time over again I would act very differently in that experience, and most assuredly I would not repeat some other well-remembered blunder.” That we cannot begin again, in this sense, does not make it less true that deep in the heart of many of us is the tragic wish—would that we could! We do not ask to begin again with our present knowledge; let us but have a clean slate, a re-start, and we will gladly take the risk as to whether we will improve upon the past, or repeat it. Ah me! For men who have travelled to my age it is a vain wish, an empty desire. But there are those who are near enough to the first beginning not to be unduly anxious about a speculative second. What then would I, with my experience of the years

which the locusts have eaten, advise them to do, and counsel them not to do?

I will speak about what I know when I say to you young people, if you would have less reason in after years to wish this vain wish, "that you could begin again"—lose no time while you have it. Begin now *to get possession of yourselves*. And by yourselves I would, for the moment, include your body, your mind, your disposition, and your attitude to others in the matter of courtesy.

As touching the body: master this fact, and reckon with it, that passion develops more quickly than reason, and unless you keep very close to the best you have been taught, to what your conscience tells you is clean and straight, by the time that experience comes to the help of reason in the handling of passion, it will be the very experience you fain would be without. It has been truly said that our bodies are part, and the highest part, of a cosmic order which is sinful only when it refuses to be spiritualised. If you regard the body as a gift worthy the Giver, as an exquisite medium for the translation of the things of the spirit, then so long as the spirit is ruler you cannot attach too much importance to the body. But if the flesh and not the spirit is

lord, it will be of little avail to wish you could begin again when, having sown to the flesh, of the flesh you must reap corruption.

This also is true of the mind. There are two men to be pitied profoundly: the man who only finds out when it is too late that he is ignorant, and the man who never finds it out at all. The cultivation of the mind, it may be said, must pre-suppose a mind to cultivate. So it does; and what then? If in our case it be but little, it is the faithful use of that little which makes us ruler over much. It is with the mind as it is with faith, we only know what we have when we must use what we have, or go under. Your years do not exempt you from this responsibility; and if you make no effort to understand the nature of your first chance in the cultivation of the mind, you would make no better use of a second. Whether or not you say it of yourself, the fate of your own making will say it for you—"could he begin again, he would do no better."

I have referred to disposition as a factor in the problem of a life saved once and for good on the same planet. A man, we are told, cannot change his disposition. That is true; but disposition can be Christianised, and this

makes all the difference between what St. Paul calls the old and the new man. That temper and courtesy, again, are an invaluable asset in life's fortunes no one but a fool will question. And by temper I do not mean a native amiability which may have little or no character in it; I mean rather the optimism that is the effluence of character, and is constantly exhaling from it like perfume from a flower. If I may so far take you into my confidence I will say that two mistakes by which I have hurt myself and others have been an imperious temper, and a want of patience with what I have been tempted to regard as stupidity in people. And as I cannot begin again, as I cannot go back to where many of you are, let me say this to you: Be courteous, get the control of your temper, watch your manners.

Get, I repeat, possession of yourselves, and, with all your getting, get close to God. Think and pray yourselves out of the common fallacy that to make God your Friend means the repression and not the expression of what is native to you. "The true principle of life," you say, "cannot be that of a suffocating pietism, of endless self-restraint. Possession of self must include the utterance of self." By

8 IF WE COULD BEGIN AGAIN

all means; only be sure which self it is you utter. You are not, as it has often been pointed out, "uttering yourself when you keep that higher self in chains, and only let your lower passions free." The counsel which is at once piety and commonsense is this—get close, and keep close, to God. Find the power to say, "I will walk at liberty, because I keep Thy precepts," and the use of your first chance will save you from all future speculation, vain as it is sad, about what you would do with a second. Take the right way from the beginning, and you will find in your own heart the living attestation that it is right; and in your obedience its unfailing verification. You will find the best enthusiasms of youth come true again in the philosophy of later years.

What has been so far said has been said more particularly to young people. Let me venture a word to those of us who are older. We cannot begin again in the years that are gone; and we may wonder why any one should deem it worth while to multiply words over a truth which it is hard to mention and not to mock. My brother man, it is the great and blessed thing about human life that, while we have it, we can always begin again. I can look back, as many of you can, upon the

things done I cannot undo. I can think bitterly enough of what I might have done, which can never be done now. There is a dead past, but far more to the purpose is it to say and know that there is yet an available present and, please God, some possible future.

The real and very solemn question with you and me is not what we did with yesterday and the day before, but what we are doing with to-day. One great truth for us all, says Goethe, is not that the past is sullied, but that the future is unsullied. It is in this sense that we should forget the things that are behind and reach on to the things that are before. I may be reminded that to talk about forgetting what we cannot help remembering is a contradiction in terms. So it is; but, thank God, it is not a contradiction in experience. Others beside the Apostle Paul have come to realise that literal remembrance and moral forgetfulness can exist side by side in the same memory and heart. I have done things in the past, sometimes from want of thought, sometimes from want of heart—things I remember with sorrow and contrition. But I have repented of them, and prayed for grace to bring forth fruits meet for repentance. And God has enabled me to realise His for-

givenness so effectually that to-day the sins, while remembered, are morally forgotten.

“Thou shalt not turn again to go by the way thou camest.” No; but while we have life we can turn to go by the only way which is to advance—we can turn to God. And when our fears ask, “What can the turn avail us now?” let us ask ourselves:—

“Man, what is this, and why are thou despairing?
God shall forgive thee all but thy despair.”

The urgency as well as the mercy of the day we have are set forth in the terse and decisive words of the Apostle: “Forgetting those things that are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

MORNING: AND AFTER

“In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand.”

ECCLESIASTES xi. 6.

“But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.”

ST. MARK xiii. 13.

II

MORNING : AND AFTER

“**I**N the morning sow thy seed, in later life garner thy harvest, and in the evening withhold thy hand. There is nothing more thou canst do. If thou hast wrought well, rest well.” But this is not what the text says. It says, indeed, the opposite of what our very instinct tells us should be the consummation of days so numbered, and of years applied to wisdom. When we think about it, however, the admonition is sustained by another and a greater word: “He that shall endure to the end, the same shall be saved.”

We cannot necessarily do in the higher life what we can sometimes do in the lower—we cannot make sure of the evening by a good use of the morning. There is a warfare from which there is no discharge on this planet. “In the morning sow thy seed, and in the

evening withhold not thine hand," for there may be an evening which, while it does not quite destroy the labour of the morning, can yet spoil it of its fruits. This, to my thinking, is part of the admonition of our text. Let us see how it works out in one or two directions.

Apply it first to the life we now live in the flesh. "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection; lest by any means, after that I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected." This is the last thing we should have expected St. Paul, of all men, to say about himself. But taking his confession at its face value, it may be read as a warning not against the possibilities of passion, but of passion exhausted. We can respect the passion indigenous to the years of passion, however we may deplore its results, that takes a man to the devil in its clean devouring flame. For, as Mark Rutherford says, such passion is "earnest as flame, and essentially pure." Much more hopeless is it when a man thinks he has his body under in a direction that is discreet and expedient, while yet that body has come to rule in things far more hopeless. And we may come to this even more surely from what is called worldly success than from failure. It is when many things have come and gone—

the struggle for wealth and place, the ties of early friendships, the buoyancy which had its seat in the blood—that the outlook appears to leave us with the problem, not how to live, but how to exist.

How many men are there in middle and later life who come to believe in nothing, to hope in nothing, on earth or in heaven, which has really to do with the things unseen and eternal? It is common to find when a man has, if not all he wants, yet all he needs, that getting older he is becoming meaner. What are called the growing infirmities of his body are coming to be the grave of his soul. Many a man who is outwardly saved by his strenuous years is, in his relaxation, a pitiable death in life. The right which he claims to indulge himself on the score of his years may be right which wrongs all that has gone before. When men are nearing the evening of life the temptation is to withhold their hand in the indulgence accorded to age: “Ah,” we say, “he is growing old; and, ‘How can a man be born when he is old?’ We must expect and humour his failings.”

I have read of an exception. He is spoken of as “such an one as Paul the aged.” He puts the case of his experience in this fashion:

“Though the outward man perish, the inward man is renewed day by day.” He who has come to feel that all which old age takes from him is loss has, in the evening, withheld his hand. In a very real sense he has fallen from grace. Is there no promise of “the house not made with hands,” where “mortality is swallowed up of life?” “He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.”

This again applies to the life we are called to live for others. “There was a period in my past years,” said an old man to me lately, “when I gave time, money, and, from want of a better word, I may say soul, to further what I desired as political and social reform. If this period kept me from more selfish pursuits, I suppose I ought to be satisfied; but it amounted to nothing. People are as they will ever be from flood to flood.” In the morning he had sown his seed, and in the evening withheld his hand, because of what seemed to him the futility of all effort to make a better world. It is among the saddest things in life when men refrain from good because, as they say, their experience has convinced them that there is no good to be done. A man had better die at forty or fifty of the lusts of the flesh than live to be hale and hearty at seventy, only to express him-

self in moral negatives, and voice his faithless findings on the possibilities of the race of which he forms a part.

There is nothing more dangerous than testimony of this order which gets itself accepted as the product of experience. And there are grades and modulations of this miserable atheism against which middle life, especially, needs to be sternly on its guard. When you hear an older man warn a younger one not to expect too much from human nature, not to put too much trust in men, not to risk his chances on the threshold of his career in trying to make better a world which, so far from thanking him, will effectually resent his efforts on its behalf—when you hear a man give counsel like this, based, as he alleges, on his own experience, look him in the face and tell him that it had been better for him had he never been born.

The evening that withholds not its hand is the “good old age that can believe in the good new age”; that can see much it has hoped and wrought for still unrealised and yet have faith in the perpetual incoming of the Kingdom of our Lord and His Christ. The day will come when we must put off the armour, but, while we have a day, we must never fail to encourage those who are putting it on. This,

to my thinking, is the soul of the admonition before us: "In the evening withhold not thine hand." Ours is a day when sayings in speech and writing are acclaimed by a thoughtless crowd just as with the blade of cynicism they cut the most deeply and neatly into our belief in unselfishness. And what an inspiration it is to young and generous natures to hear an old man of proved character, intelligence, and service, affirm his unshaken trust in the things of God and a higher humanity. It is when a man's work is done that, in this sense, he does his best work. When, in the evening of our days, we can still believe that good is good, although from the prepossessions of earlier years we find it hard to recognise it as good, we quicken others with a diviner life, and uplift them with a new courage. "For myself," says a wise teacher, "my religion and my convictions about many questions that agitate men's minds and hearts are, on this side of the grave, unalterable. But I will ever pray for the open heart which includes all attempts to do good as within the great harmonies of God."

"In the evening withhold not thine hand." This applies once more to the good fight of faith. "Keep yourselves in the faith." For nothing in religion can stand between us and

old age but the moral quality of our faith. Because faith, if it is faith and not mere opinion, is the most complete and distinct exponent of what a man is. There are multitudes who believe in Christianity in the sense that they do not deny it. Some of them, to use an expressive Scotch word, "sit" in the Church; some have their names on the roll who, young and comparatively young in other directions, have yet all but reached senility in their religion. While their sun is yet at its meridian in seeking after the things which are of the earth, earthy, it is evening with them in their hopes and strivings after those things which are eternal in the heavens.

When a man, by reason of strength, reaches and passes certain milestones in life, we assign reasons; and among them we note especially a mind in touch with the manifold interests and activities of the outward world and the reaction of this sympathy on the body. So is it in higher things. He who has no genuine interest in his religion—gives nothing, does nothing for it that has any blood, any sacrifice in it, has only to examine himself to find that, if there is one possession he does not possess, it is faith in God and in His saving power. If we do not keep ourselves in the faith

faith cannot keep itself in us. We must get more by using well what we have; and we might as well try to sustain physical life on the food we ate last year as try to live on the faith of the past: "In the evening withhold not thine hand."

Is it, then, to be all struggle? Is there no rest in it; no brightness? How was it with our Lord and Master? It is usual to say that He died a young man, and in the rose-bloom of His life. In count of years, yes; and yet with a body so broken for our sin, so wounded for our transgressions, that it could not last long. The death that followed Him through life was His friend at last. As Stopford Brooke well says, "His sorrow, kinder than the nails, killed Him in a few hours." But He endured to the end. Because at its evening He withheld not His hand, we are made the rightness of God in Him.

Follow in His footsteps, and there is an end to pain and strain and sorrow—it is the peace of God that passeth knowledge. There is an end to decay and death—it is eternal growth in the eternal life of our Lord. Unless we are growing better it is a terrible thing to grow old. Approach the years as they draw nigh worthily. Keep the faith that works by love, and we shall have the joy of the only evening that can wait

for and welcome the advent of the new morning. "Rather than my life being over," writes a man of nearly fourscore years, "it is a series of new beginnings in seeking and finding fresh recruits for the service. And just before I go home, I want my last find for the Master to be the biggest and the best." "It is not," said Wellington, "that the British are necessarily better soldiers or braver men than the French. Where we had our advantage was in this—we could always keep on a quarter of an hour longer." "In the evening withhold not thine hand."

THE MIND-CURE

“Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

ROMANS xii. 2.

III

THE MIND-CURE

THERE are two things upon which we have largely to depend for happiness, and what we regard as life values—physical health, and hope, or outlook. Take the former of these, and consider for a moment the action of the mind on the body. There are some who doubt, others who affect to doubt, whether this action is what it is affirmed to be by those who have made it a study. They can only, so they tell us, accept some things that are said about it in the case of neurotic, nervous, or decadent subjects.

Very well: let us select an instance outside these. Take the man who boasts that he has no “nerves,” and has rarely known a day’s sickness in his life. Tell him suddenly, on evidence he cannot question, that the bank, company, or concern in which he has, or had, his money, is gone down leaving “scarce a

wreck behind," and watch the effect of your words. I myself have seen a strong, middle-aged man, who was wont to laugh at what he called "nervy people," become an old man in a night from ill news working through the mind on the body. "How do you feel now?" I once said to a man who was to all appearances very far through. And he answered, "I could get well, were it but a matter of feeling; I am dying of what I *think*." There is a profound scientific reason underlying the admonition: "Be ye transformed by the *renewing* of your mind." Our medical doctors as never before are hard upon the question—"Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased?" They have, as one of their profession has said, found themselves compelled to join the ranks of the "students of psychology, and follow their patients into the wider fields of mental therapeutics."

The action of the mind, again, on our moral outlook is quite as decisive. It has been remarked that we can, if we will, think people into what we would have them be. It were truer to say that it is by thinking the best of people that we find the best in them. You are at variance with a man. Everything he does or says is an offence to your sight and hearing. But let your mind change towards him from

bitterness to benevolence, and, whatever he may be, he is transformed to you by this renewing of your mind. For the renewing means that your mind is so filled with new and better thoughts about the man as to leave no room for the old and the worse. It is the only way to get out and keep out the whole content of sinister forces.

It also does much to banish the devil-shadows of worry about the present, and foreboding about the future. We often hear it said of a man who is so giving place to anxiety about his health or his affairs as to invite the troubles he dreads—"What he needs is something to take him out of himself." If by this is meant change of habit or pursuit, that is not likely to take him out of himself. We cannot run away from what we carry with us. It is not change of circumstances such a man needs, but himself changed. This is the change which for him changes all.

Cease from worry, and whether or not the world is better in itself, we shall think it better. Let me quote a bit of valuable testimony in support of this statement: "While I was waiting on the platform, I saw the train move out which it meant money for me to take. I had to miss it because the porter had not arrived with

my luggage. When he came, he began hurriedly to explain that a block in the streets had delayed him. 'It doesn't matter,' I said, 'here is your fee, and I am sorry you have had all this trouble in earning it.' The look of surprise that came over his face was so filled with pleasure that I was repaid on the spot for my delay in departure. Next day he would not accept a cent for his service; and he and I are friends for life." Do not miss the significance of these words: "He and I are friends for life." Get our minds right towards the world, and the world will seem to go out of its way to be right with us. It will be transformed by this renewing of our mind.

The question then arises: How is the renewing to become a real thing in our daily life and experience? And my answer is—by its relation to God. If we believe in God, surely we have some expectation from Him: "Whatsoever ye shall ask in My name," says Jesus; "whatsoever ye shall ask that I can ask for you, it shall be done unto you." And it must be that Christ can ask for us what we may well covet as among the best gifts—a mind "in tune with the Infinite."

Find the mind-cure in God. Get the peace that passeth knowledge and nothing else very

much matters. We shall have our troubles, which cannot be spirited away by wishing them away; we shall have our disappointments, and the cost of our limitations. But our mental attitude to most things largely determines their influence upon us. This has often been said, and it is true. But it is even more true to say, that a mind stayed upon God can change the attitude from the foreboding that defeats to the hope that saves, and the confidence that is victory. God asks one thing of us; He could not ask less, and, giving it, we cannot give more. One thing, which is—that we make it possible for Him to help us. Whatever else a teacher may find, or not find, in a pupil, he must find willingness to learn or everything else is waste of effort. It is not even a question of ability so much as of disposition. And God is not dependent upon what we can do, but upon what we have it in our hearts to do.

Have we a good conscience when we say: “Lord, with all its failings and unworthiness this is the best I can do to-day; accept it, not because of what it is, but because of what Thou art”? “Having done all,” says the Apostle, “stand.” If we have done our best, give up all responsibility. Resign all care of it into the hands of a higher keeping. Be God’s fatalists,

genuinely indifferent about what to-morrow may bring, and we shall gain that inward peace which comes of the assurance that all things do, all things must, work together for good to them who are set to do God's will, and to make it their own.

The author of that remarkable book, "The Varieties of Religious Experience," reminds us of the old story of a man who, on a dark night and along an unknown way, found himself slipping down what he concluded was a precipice. He caught hold of a branch that arrested his fall, and clinging to it remained for a time, and a long time it seemed, in agony; but finally, and with a despairing farewell of life, he relaxed his hold and fell—six inches! Had he given up earlier, much of that terrible experience would have been spared him. It is, I say, an old story, and preachers have used it, and wisely used it to say that, as the mother-earth—so close to this man's feet, had he known it—received him, so will the Everlasting Arms receive us if we fall absolutely into them, and give up relying on our personal strength, as if that were our only safeguard and avail.

If this is not the theological doctrine of justification by faith, it is a good working form of it. For what is justification by faith

but faith justified in experience when we surrender our self-will and fall back without a question on the Providence that shapes our ends. Do we serve God for naught? Never, if we put into our service any trust worth the name. Centre ourselves in Him. Stake our whole on Him; keep back no part of the price. God is spirit, so are we; spirit of His spirit, and what is well with Him cannot, if we live in Him, be ill with us.

I do not say, for I do not believe, that, amid my physical aches and pains and chances of accident, amid the troubles inevitable to my mortal lot, I have but to think them away to find them gone. The laws of nature, and the needs of character, do not take notice to quit on these terms. But I do believe that if I cannot think these drawbacks out of existence, I can think it out of their power to do me evil and not good. Let me love God's will and, by His help, do it; then let *Him* take the anxiety as to how it will work out. If I be a follower of that which is good, it is no concern whatever of mine where it leads me. With our mind thus renewed, and at rest from its more disquieting elements, the body will get the best chance we can give it. And the body will take it while again our out-

look upon life will be transformed by a temper that gets as it gives :—

“ There are loyal hearts, there are spirits brave,
There are souls that are pure and true ;
Then give to the world the best you have,
And the best will come back to you.”

PROSPERITY AND PIETY

“Blessed is the man . . . whose delight is in the law of
the Lord. . . . Whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.”

PSALM i. 2, 3.

IV

PROSPERITY AND PIETY

HALF the controversies in the world, we are told, are verbal ones, and could they be brought to a plain issue, they would be brought to a prompt termination. When men understand each other's meaning they see, for the most part, that controversy is either superfluous or hopeless. "Oh, is that what you mean?" says one; "then I agree with you." Or he says, "If that is what you mean by such a term, I entirely differ from you, and further discussion is useless." When the Psalmist roundly declares that whatsoever the man, whose delight is in the law of the Lord, doeth, shall prosper, he probably had in his thoughts what we mean when we talk about success. He intended, I can quite believe, to associate material prosperity with piety, and piety with material prosperity. Can we, then, from what

we know, or think we know, about the facts and experiences of our modern world support his word and say, "You are quite right"?

If you apprehend the meaning in which I use this word prosperity, you will instantly see that controversy about it is either superfluous or hopeless. You may not like the meaning; you may not admit it in this connection. I cannot help that. It is enough for my present purpose that we mean the same thing by the same word. Time teaches us—in fact compels us—to put new meaning into our words; and I hold it true to say, that a good man may prosper in all he doeth, and yet hardly succeed in anything, if we mean by success what the world ordinarily does mean by it. There are failures that are victories, and there are successes which an honest man would rather be without. Before we conclude that a thing is worth its price, we must consider well its cost. We may know the price of a thing and not its value. Success has to do with the price, prosperity with the value. When a man betters his circumstances, puts money in his purse, wins public recognition, at the expense of upright character, he may be justified on his level in calling it success; but no wise onlooker would call it prosperity.

It is possible for such a man to go on adding more to much, conscious all the while that God can hardly reckon him a greater moral failure than his own conscience does, whenever it gets a chance to speak. In this sense I repeat he may succeed, and the world will acclaim it as success; but no man prospers except as his soul prospers.

Yet even in this matter of success the Psalmist has something to say for himself. If we look back thoughtfully over our past defeats we cease to talk about the want of things, and begin to question ourselves about the use we have made of the things we had. Our failure is not that our gifts or our religion fails us; it is for the most part that we fail our gifts and our religion. If our delight is in the law of the Lord, it is inconceivable that this shall have no correcting effect upon the things that lame us—such, for example, as defects of temper, lapses from good sense, and that slovenly half-doing things that reflects so seriously on our capacity to do them at all. I know there are disappointments and failures in human life for which those who have to bear them have no direct responsibility. There are cases where it cannot be said of good men, acting from the best of motives, that whatsoever they do shall succeed.

It is when we lift the question to a higher level that the word of the Psalmist stands out unassailable by any peradventure. It is when we get it into the region of character that his affirmation, like the fact in which it is based, defies all onslaught. Whatsoever a man doeth, whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and whose deed is wrought in the spirit of this delight—shall prosper. He ceases to measure the success of an action by its material return. It is no longer a question of what it makes for him, but what he makes himself in the doing of it.

The material side has its place, but it is not the only side, nor is it the principal one. I met a man a few weeks ago, who was on the eve of an undertaking which meant, in a sense, everything to his future position and prospects. "You must be an anxious man at present," I said to him. "Yes, I am anxious," he answered, "but only for those who with me are involved in this matter. If I know myself," he added, "I have left nothing undone I could have done to ensure and deserve success. If I fail, God's will be done; I am sure He has His own will concerning me, and I can trust it."

I knew these words to be the man; and I

also knew that whether the undertaking succeeded or not, he himself was bound to prosper, for his life was built not upon success, but on character. Every day I live deepens my conviction, that all life worth living resolves itself into a simple, thoughtful, unquestioning trust in God; and, in the strength of that trust, a whole-hearted doing of whatever falls within the province of our duty and opportunity.

Get God into our life (which means selfishness out of it), and, while our projects may sometimes disappoint us on the side most apparent to the world, we shall know there is no failure where there is no fracture of a loving dependence upon God. We are in this world neither to fail nor succeed, but to use whatever rightly enters into the making of character; to grow in grace with God and man, and, in the measure we are doing this, everything we do shall prosper. "Life is not yours," says Count Tolstoy, "it is something given you. Therefore do your task, strive against wrong, overcoming evil with good, so that love may flow into you from the source of all life. In all else you will fail, since for nothing else were you born."

ONE VOICE: TWO INTERPRETATIONS

“Then came there a voice from heaven. . . . The people therefore, that stood by, and heard it, said that it thundered : others said, An angel spake to him.”

ST. JOHN xii. 28-9.

V

ONE VOICE: TWO INTERPRETATIONS

EXACTLY, in the first place, what people are saying to-day. To some, every phase of discipline, disappointment, trouble, or even change—is thunder. To others, the same experience has in it something of an angel's speech; an assurance that thunder is a part of order, not of disorder, that in the most furious storms there are laws as determinate as those that operate in every sphere of physical and moral growth.

These two explanations of the same phenomena are illustrated on every side. In business, let us say, one man can hear nothing but thunder, sullen and ominous; another man can always say even of this thunder, "An angel has spoken to me." "How is it with you in trade?" you ask the former, and he answers as from a sepulchre: "Do not enquire; there is a fair turnover but no profit, and what there is doing

will be less before it is more. What with foreign tariffs, Unions, and strikes, trade is all being driven out of the country." You put the question to another man—and although you do not meet him at every turn he is occasionally to be found—who answers: "Well, I am quiet at present, but I have had my good times, and, please God, I shall have them again." To one man every bit of stiff fortune is what thunder is to the savage—the anger of the unexplainable. To another man it is one of the happenings in life which, handled with hope and courage, always give more than they take.

It is, however, in the Home that these different tempers—or temperaments—work out in their most pronounced forms of weal or woe. For of all the places of life, at any rate up to a given age, the influences of home do most to make or mar us. Whether or not we have two selves, we have two manifestations of self; and many a man, who dare not lift his voice above a whisper in the world, fills the place called his home with continual thunder. Our sensibility to pleasure is our susceptibility to pain. Where we can be most helped we can be most hindered. We get used to thunder in the world, and even in the more limited area of our social surrounding; but what when we get it, and that incessantly, in

the home? There are men and women to whom the troubles that must surely come into the lot of every household, into the fortunes of every family, are always forces charged with disaster. They dare not enjoy the sunshine there is, for fear that shadows are lurking the while beneath the horizon. There are others again, who, passing through a valley of Baca, make it a well. They smile at us through their tears and in answer to our words and looks of sympathy say: "Yes, the cloud is dark and heavy, but it will pass." "Sorrow may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."

It is exactly what people are always saying, some that it thunders, and others that an angel speaks to them. And, in the second place, there is a sense in which it is well they should. We may say it thunders when we should say that an angel speaks, and we may say that an angel speaks when we should say it thunders.

The sorrow of an earnest man in our day is not only in the fact that there is thunder in the world, but that so many people both inside and outside the Christian Church, some for constitutional and others for selfish reasons, will not hear it for what it is. They close their eyes and ears to all the moral and physical evil they pos-

sibly can. And when they cannot help hearing and seeing evil, they would account for it, as Emerson seems to do, as a necessary stage in the development of good, as a defect, or form of limitation, rather than a something organic, positive, and deadly. These people may be pleasant to meet in those interludes of life given up to play and pleasure; they may impose upon us as broad-minded, tolerant men of the world who formulate no views, and weary us with no lessons; but when error and error's charges, when sin and sin's consequences are rolling over men's souls like a flood, then we must have the sons of thunder—men who know the meaning of things and are strong enough to make us face them for what they are.

We need men still—one wonders whether we ever needed them more—of the Carlyle temper. Men of uncompromising thunder, who see in the evil they are persuaded is evil, nothing but evil. The optimism gone mad, which chooses to dream that this in which we live, is the best of possible worlds, is but another form of heartless irony. For the overwhelming majority of human beings this order of angel's speech is mockingly inconsistent with hard, pitiless reality. We need to be told that no man of us thinks it worth his while to be reformer or Christian, who thinks

it worth his while to be anything else; and he who is worth world room has something better to do than play the fiddle while Rome is burning.

Both are necessary—the men who hear God's voice as thunder and the men who hear it in the angel's speech. For after all, and in the third place, both, as in the incident before us, are attempts to explain the same fact.

When our Saviour entered upon His last conflict He prayed not that He might be delivered from it, but that He might be sustained in it. "Father," He cried, "Glorify *Thy* name." Then came a voice from Heaven, the Father's response to the aching heart of His well-beloved Son. It was the answer of eternal love to the passion of Him Who won our salvation; but whilst it fell upon the heart of some as an angel's speech, it smote upon the ears of others as thunder. And we shall miss much if we overlook the significance of this; if it do not force upon us the question: How do we hear? How do we interpret the voice from heaven to our lives on earth?

We may, as many do, deny that we have any responsibility in the matter at all. We may say that we hear as we are made, that it depends upon temperament, and religion never changes

temperament. This is true; but, as I have before remarked, religion can so Christianise temperament as to make all the difference between what St. Paul calls the old and the new man. To assert the make of a man as his omnipotence is part of the very real heresy of our day. What nature cannot do in that it is weak through the flesh, grace can do. The pessimist by nature can become an optimist by conviction. No ghost is all ghost when we face it with the courage of faith.

I often recall a curious but very suggestive incident we have in the Old Testament. It is the story of a man who had, or imagined he had, seen an angel; and his imagination, instead of being his inspiration, turned to superstition. "We have seen God" he said, "and no man can see God and live." But fortunately for him he had a wife who was on the side of the angels. She first let him have his trouble out. She did not "break in upon a semi-colon." Not a few men like to be miserable at times. Deny them, I will not say the right, but the opportunity, to be miserable and you cut off from them a principal source of enjoyment. When, however, this man had recovered a little from his heart-break his wife quietly said to him, "If the Lord had been pleased to kill us, He would not have

received a burnt offering at our hands, neither would He have showed us these things." And the thing to be noted here is—that the woman did not attempt to rationalise the cause of her husband's trouble into some figment of his imagination. She, too, identified it with God, but she had a finer and truer conception of God than he had. Without irreverence be it said, she could trust God to "play the game." "Had He been pleased to kill us, He would not have received a burnt offering at our hands."

Master this truth, and life has little else to teach us. It is not life which has no purpose in it, and God's purpose in our life is character. Let us put the spirit of Christ into the practice of that old creed: "Do justly, love mercy, but walk humbly with God"; and the rest, with all its hard schooling, will be forgotten in the final gain sooner than it takes me to pronounce the word. We may not fully realise our gain to-day; but, when we look back upon it all out of the white radiance of eternity, we shall see that it was every day and all the way. Be right with God and nothing else matters. Things which appear as ghosts to-day will reveal themselves as angels to-morrow. Make it possible for God to help us through a "faith that is never

50 ONE VOICE: TWO INTERPRETATIONS

afraid to reason, and a reason that is never ashamed to adore," and we shall always hear the voice from heaven ; it may sometimes be as thunder, but we shall know that in the thunder is the angel whisper.

THE TEST OF THE PATRIARCH'S FAITH

“And it came to pass . . . that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, . . . Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah ; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.”

GENESIS xxii. 1, 2.

VI

THE TEST OF THE PATRIARCH'S FAITH

THIS command is said to have come to the Patriarch objectively through a voice from without. I will not question this; but I can also understand how it could come subjectively as the voice of duty. Whether or not Abraham felt as we feel that such sacrifices must be abhorrent to the nature of Jehovah, he saw those about him, Chaldeans, as he had seen Canaanites, offering their first-born to their gods. Was he to fall behind the heathen in refusing his dearest possession to Him whom he worshipped as the one and only true God? Whether this command came through an outward voice or from an inward impulse may not be a matter of first importance. But the Patriarch's *obedience* to the command is. It is the core of saving religion on the human side. We cannot do more; to do less intentionally is to

fail in the one thing which is to make failure of all. Our equation in higher things is simply our obedience to the voice within, which we know to be the voice of duty.

From our point of view, says a well-known expositor, this trial is wholly without cause; the terms of it read as little better than "an edict of wanton and meaningless cruelty. No reason is given. No justification is offered. The fearful demand is made point-blank, and no compromise is possible." But mark the saving clause here—"from our point of view." I believe that the edict was in the Patriarch's own conscience or sense of duty; while at the same time the story emphasises the fact that God does sometimes insist upon a distinct Yes or No in the province of sacrifice, when to falter is to fail.

For practical uses this difficult bit of Scripture may be resolved into two questions: What when we do not falter, but take God at His word, as we understand it? When we act upon conviction with the full approval of conscience, do we find that Providence duly responds to the obedience? We are told that it did in the particular instance before us; but have we always found a ram in the thicket just at the opportune moment? In colloquial phrase, have we always found Providence play

up to our faith? Some of us could say how we have made sacrifices which conscience asked, but which circumstances did not justify. We have taken risks in the name of the Lord, and they have gone against us ; and as we have passed down in the class of the world's chances, we have heard ourselves dismissed by the wise in their generation with the contemptuous epithet of "crank " or "fool." When men of the world say to us : What does your sacrifice, roped in by conscience, as you call it, do for you in a day when not conscience but expediency rules? what answer have we? Do we always find, when faith is on the rack, that there is something which answers to the old words : "And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him for a burnt offering in the stead of his son"?

Can we say that Providence never fails us? This is our first question. Permit me to waive it for a moment to ask a second : Can we say that we never fail Providence? For we must not overlook one very important consideration in an inquiry like this. It is not enough that we obey God according to conscience ; we must try to make sure that our conscience, while on

its inner throne and speaking with authority, is also speaking with intelligence and wisdom. In fewer words, the conscience must not only be quickened but enlightened. There is a limit set to what we may ask and expect of Providence. What is it? Clearly, that we ask for things that will fulfil our life and not destroy it; for bread and not a stone, for fish and not a serpent. Before we conclude that Providence has refused our asking, were it not better to pause over the question—have we asked wisely of Providence? I know a man to-day who has persuaded himself that his mental gifts have become the peril of his soul; that he is making them an idol. And to crucify this pride he has sentenced his more than two talents to the drudgery of him who has only one. Who could argue with a conscience like this? It is not enough that we follow the dictates of conscience, and then seek to shoulder the consequences on Providence. One positively wonders at times what degree of intelligence some of us attribute to Providence. We appear to expect from the Almighty what we should never dream of asking from a sensible man. Conscience must never despise common-sense. "Give me wisdom," prays the Psalmist, "and I shall keep Thy statutes." The man who thinks and prays

himself into what the Bible calls the "understanding of the Lord," and makes that understanding the ally of his conscience, has found, because he has fulfilled, the condition of taking risks. Let him then do and dare, for he can say with confidence: "The Lord will provide Himself a burnt offering."

The trial of Abraham's faith has usually been represented as little better than an experiment on this man's simple trust by a power that was playing with it. Let us write out such an impression. The Patriarch lived in a day when the father's right to take his son's life was absolute and unquestioned—if that right was exercised as a religious observance. To sacrifice the first-born was held to be the highest form of obedience to the mysterious Power men called by many names. The father of the faithful saw other fathers doing this, whose sons were to them as Isaac was to him. Was he to do less for Jehovah than they were doing for gods that to him were no gods? He was acting in simple obedience, as he conceived it, to what his conscience told him was due to the Most High. In this man faith had its perfect work. The father's heart was breaking, but the "Hebrew hand was firm." And as he was about to strike, that Higher Power intervened.

And so it always does—a statement I make without reservation. Jesus has taught us to call God “Our Father.” And let us not rob the name of its meaning by thinking of Him as so fettered by what we are pleased to call the “general laws of His administration” that He is unable to keep His word or fulfil His promises. He can fulfil His word; He does fulfil His promises. But we owe it to ourselves, and in the interests of our faith, to try and make sure by such means as are within our reach, whether it is *His* will we ask Him to fulfil; whether it is *His* promise we ask Him to keep.

A man once applied for a position under a municipal corporation, and asked me to be a reference. “But,” I said to him, “have you the knowledge and necessary training to fill the place if you get it?” “Oh,” he answered, “the thing is to get it; for the rest I shall have help from above.” This was his answer, which he gave me in all good faith; and it is perhaps on a level with not a little of our asking from Providence, and it may be the reason why such asking ends in itself. There surely must be some correspondence between what we ask of God and what our knowledge of ourselves tells us God can give. That nature has not made us big enough to receive certain

things does not demonstrate that Providence is not. Prayer to it cannot put in what nature has left out.

And in saying this, let me not be misunderstood. Nature has put more in than the most strenuous of us bring out. While again, the most strenuous often fail because they overlook the "need of patience that, having done the will of God, they might receive the promise." Mark the words: "having *done* the will of God." For there is no more supreme test of trust in God than to wait His time wisely, especially when His Providence seems overdue.

The recently published "Letters of Marcus Dods" are suggestive of many things; but in thought of what I am trying to say, there is one thing worth special mention. It was his bitter experience to endure more than five years' waiting between his being licensed by the Presbytery and getting a church. In one of these letters he likens himself to the cripple at the Pool of Bethesda who, when the Angel gave healing virtue to the water, was unable because of his handicap to avail himself of his opportunity. But, says Dods significantly, "One thing I did not do, I did not throw mud at the Angel." In other words, he did not gird at circumstances, nor fling gibes at the omissions

60 TEST OF THE PATRIARCH'S FAITH

of Providence. With every fibre of his brain and will did he dig into the ores of knowledge, saying to himself: "A church I may never get, but if I do, I will be ready for the church." And when waiting had done its work, Providence opened up to him the mighty purpose for which he had been girded. The God who kept Marcus Dods waiting those trying years was the God who made him "chief among the brethren."

If we can wait, as well as do; if we bring the fire and the wood, God will provide the lamb for the burnt offering. Believe this, and believing, leave the final issue with Him. Having taken heed, be quiet. We need never try to rush Providence; it will be to time. Remember it was just when the Patriarch was about to strike, that upon the conscience which said slay there flashed a revelation, and the same conscience said, Stay thy hand.

Let us seek to cultivate the grace which can deliver our religion from the formal and lifeless on the one side, and from the impatient and hysterical on the other. If we are honestly set to hold all gain and pleasure perfectly at the service of our convictions of duty, in obedience to the gospel of truth and righteousness, we shall find that quite as many sacrifices will be demanded of us as we are well able to

meet. It was not impulse, fanaticism, or self-will that took the Patriarch to Moriah, it was the all-consuming desire to offer to God his best. And when we have settled it with God and a God-taught conscience that a course is right to take, a life is good to live, take the course and fear not; live the life and leave all consequences with the All-wise. They may frown to-day, but they will smile to-morrow; while to-day and to-morrow we shall realise what a sane, noble, joy-giving power this life of faith on the Son of God is.

LOST BLESSINGS

Preached on the first Sunday of the New Year

“By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea,
we wept, when we remembered Zion.”

PSALM cxxxvii. 1.

VII

LOST BLESSINGS

IN his inaugural address as Lord Rector of the University of Edinburgh, Carlyle, among other things, said: "At the season when you are in young years, the mind as a whole is, as it were, fluid, and is capable of forming itself into any shape that the owner of the mind pleases to order it to form itself into. The mind, I repeat, is in a fluid state, but it hardens up gradually into the consistency of iron or rock. And you cannot alter the habits of an old man. Which means that as he has begun he will proceed to go on to the last."

There may be exceptions which take something of the fate out of this last sentence, but the fact that they are exceptions adds weight to the warning. And, indeed, Carlyle need not have instanced old age to emphasise

his message. Essential character finds its steel or stone long before we are old in the count of years. Take an obvious instance of what I mean in the neglect of opportunities which, unused, never repeat themselves. How many of us, past a given age—and it does not take long to arrive at it—are by the rivers of Babylon, when we might have been in the Zion of worthy things attempted, and worthy things done?

How often when a man should be at his best, if training and experience go for anything, do we find him silent, depressed, and perhaps morose in the home; with these characteristics, as far as it is safe to indulge them, in his other relationships to the world generally. This may be the outcome of many things; frequently enough it resolves itself into one. Few men can do their best; most men find it terribly hard to escape their worst, when the fluid of the greater possibilities has hardened while yet unused, and the possibilities are no more. I am far from saying that all, but I do say that much of the gray existence many of us have to endure, much of the eclipse of our hopes, is the truth in a greater or less degree—we are by the rivers of the Babylon of our own making; we are in

the ranks of those who remember only to regret.

“The issues of the life to be
We weave with colours all our own ;
And, in the fields of destiny,
We reap as we have sown.”

If a man is not there when his chances are, we may pity him, but pity, as the Orientals say, “does not keep back the car.” “And when the bridegroom came, they that were *ready* went in, and the door was shut.” No, we cannot keep back the car. When a man has thrown away his chances, which, used, would have put money to his credit, and incense into his realised ambitions; that he should hear himself called a fool and should know himself to be what he is called—we mostly understand that. It has to do with loss in things seen and actual. But there is a river of Babylon with a deeper source and a deadlier flow. What about the things neglected, the trust betrayed, and the day of grace slighted in the sphere of the Unseen and Eternal? We realise what it means to lose our world; would that we even tried to realise what it means to lose our life!

If I know myself, I know that in many

things I am by the rivers of Babylon. When I think of some of the once possible Zions in my life, the things that might have been, I, too, could weep or curse as the mood may be. But what would that avail? It is sad to have failed in good that can never be recovered; but it is sadder still to lose the living in the folly of mourning a dead past. Jesus taught an irreparable past, but never without reminding us of the available present. He said, "Let the dead bury their dead"; and He said, "Follow thou Me."

When the angel with the drawn sword stands at the entrance to certain Edens, let us know that these are a paradise we shall never re-enter. But we need not on that account make bad worse by losing all. We can, if we will, strengthen the things that remain; we can do more, we can change them into the nature of a sacrament, and round them off as with the finish and calm of a holy benediction. Let us take our eyes and thoughts away from the angel with the flaming sword. The song which the redeemed sing in heaven is not the song of Eden, it is "a new song." Out of the experience of our folly, our failure, and our sin—with it all behind us, we must move on to our better future.

And we can. Our failures are failures only when we accept them for what they seem. He only is beaten who has settled it with himself that he does not intend to try again. If we are sincere in our repentance over a wasted past, and in earnest to lay hold of the present, then we enter a divine economy where even failures can be utilised. This is where Christianity enters with the word of authority, and places against the fact of our failure the power to use it as a spur and incentive towards higher things. The Apostle Paul would never have written the Epistle to the Galatians—that Magna Carta of the soul's liberty in Christ—had he not once been a proud, haughty, and persecuting ecclesiastic. Augustine would never have penned the Confessions had there been no bitter experience out of which the Confessions were wrung.

Let us not sit too long by the rivers of Babylon remembering our Zions. While we have life and moral responsibility there is always something we can do. It would be foolish to ignore the sterner aspect of life as set forth in the earlier part of this short address; but we are not asked to accept it as despotic. It is a sad thing to say of a day wasted, it is too late to mend it; and how

much more awful to say it of a life. Begin, then, with another year, not from a past to which we can never go back: nor from an imaginary future which we have not reached. Begin from the present with its treasury of good—aye, and its accumulation of evil; and keeping the pathway unbroken from the past, through the present to the future, press on in answer to the call of the great good God whose word is ever onward and upward.

I began with a note of warning, and I must end with it: “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.” This experience can be repeated in every human life. Let not another New Year’s day be but a stage nearer the day when the recording angel must set it down:—

“A life of nothings, nothing worth—
From that first nothing ere his birth
To the last nothing under earth.”

AN ALL-INCLUSIVE PROMISE

“For all things are yours ; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come ; all are yours ; and ye are Christ’s ; and Christ is God’s.”

1 CORINTHIANS iii. 21-23.

VIII

AN ALL-INCLUSIVE PROMISE

WE have heard and read this statement endless times on the authority of St. Paul that "all things" are ours. But have we ever found reason to pause over its scope and application? "All things"; not only the unseen but the seen, not only the spiritual but the temporal; "or things present or things to come." Whether or not we can get any sensible meaning out of the statement, the statement itself is sufficiently explicit: "All things are yours, whether in this world or the next."

In approaching it we do well to bear in mind what has often been pointed out, that ownership may not mean possession. We can own a thing and not possess it. And when the Apostle says, "All things are yours," he may mean, not necessarily ownership, but the right to, and the possibility in, possession. It would

be easy to bring out this distinction by a reference to some very close relationships in human life, but I will take one which may be less painful in its suggestion. Two men stand before a great picture. One has bought it for so much money. In this sense he owns it; but beyond that he knows nothing, and apart from its cash value or the distinction of being its owner, he cares nothing about the picture. To the other man it is a vision, an inspiration, a shrine at which to worship. We know which man owns the picture, but who possesses it?

And this question opens up a truth we easily overlook, and, doing so, miss much. Life—what the Scriptures call “everlasting life”—is being. And being is greater than having; it is greater than doing. Mr. Walter Pater finely expresses this when he says that “the end of life is not action but contemplation”—which means, if I understand him, that the end of life is not in what we have, it is not in what we do, it is the quiet omnipotence of what we are. It is in being that we find out how much of our true riches is in knowing how, and what, to do without. All things are yours which are the true annexation of the soul, and he whose being in this sense gives him

their possession does not think himself wronged if it do not carry with it the accident of ownership.

So far the way is fairly clear, but only so far. What of the comparatively few who own so much more than they possess, and the multitudes who earn so much more than they own? And the Apostle says, "All things are yours, of things *present* or things to come." Are there not times when things present are more necessary in the matter of ownership than possession is in the meaning of appreciation?

One thing is certain: Christianity can never be indifferent about "things present." It can never matter nothing to a Christian man whether government is just, commerce honest, social life healthy, and the people nourished in mind and body. A religion which is worth world-room must take up into itself whatever helps a man to prove himself, whatever helps him to fulfil the whole scope of his being. "While it makes war against abuses it breaks down unjust privileges, it removes oppression, it liberates the cramped and fettered limbs, and trains and animates the energies thus set free from restraint." At the same time it insists upon the fact that no estimate of Christianity which "dwells only on its beneficence and

forgets its exacting severities" can be anything but misleading. All things are ours, but ours by strenuous effort, patient waiting, and willing sacrifice.

He Who is good and perfect wants us to be as He is. He places at our disposal all that is requisite for our perfection up to the point we can attain. What, then, stands between us and an honest and unmistakable approach to this perfection? If all that is requisite is ours, why have we it not? Ask of selfishness—that which, because it reigns in your life, and mine, rules the world of which we form a part. If we were putting the mind that was in Christ into His own commandment to "do to others as we would that others should do to us"; to "love our neighbour as ourself"—that is, love in him, in her, what God loves in us—do we doubt or question for a moment that human society would speedily come upon the power of a new day; upon that diviner order of society which can only be built upon the basis of all for each and each for all? "For ye are Christ's," and therefore not your own. Every gift, every bit of individual resource is, in us, put in trust for others. To keep it back from our brother is to keep it back from Christ; and we know how He will handle this

treason against the crown-rights of humanity: "Depart from Me; I never knew you."

Some time ago, we are told, a conversation took place in a Swiss hotel. The speakers were three Englishmen. "The brotherhood of man," exclaimed one of them—a brilliant Oxford graduate, and high in the Civil Service—"is a beautiful ideal! In my younger days I accepted it frankly, and believed in treating every man as an equal. But experience of the world has shaken that belief and, to-day, I see the beauty of the ideal, but I hold it to be utterly impracticable." Some one, in reply, mentioned the name of Jesus. "Ah!" broke in the first speaker, "if you bring Christ in, that makes all the difference. If we *were* living by His teaching I quite agree it would be possible."

Have some of us settled it with ourselves that, though we see the beauty of the ideal, it must be put aside as impracticable? I grant that in brooding hours of darkness we are tempted to take a desponding view. When we see what human nature is, when we see what Christian human nature is, when we see in what should be a straight, stand-up fight against the evils within and without us, how little stamina there appears to be in the world,

we are almost discouraged. One feels at times that men are only veneered by Christianity, and never radically changed by it. But there is one thing to the good: we are coming to realise as never before—and it is a tremendous advance in moral insight—that, though we may not commit ourselves to this change, the change is possible. We must not ride off on the assumption that when St. Paul says “all things are yours,” he is thinking solely of what we ordinarily call “moral and spiritual possessions.” Read the passage again and note carefully its terms: “All things, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or *things present*, or *things to come*; all are yours; and ye are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s.”

Prefer if you must Paul the theologian to Apollos the rhetorician, or Apollos the rhetorician to Peter the great human. But why, asks the Apostle, by limiting yourselves to one, should you miss the good in all? And if ye are Christ’s, who, or what, shall set bounds to whatever is good to have and enjoy? We do not say that heaven is here or nowhere, but we do say that heaven, in its own degree, should be now as in any conceivable future. If all things are ours why

should there be this all-but-hopeless contradiction between the spiritual hopes and the temporal surroundings of vast masses of the people?—a contradiction which, if pushed much further, will mean an utter break-up of the fabric of society.

I hope for better things. I believe God. It is not for nothing that men to-day are dreaming such dreams as shone before the soul of the prophet-statesmen like Isaiah and Micah—dreams of a reconstructed society, of a regenerated state, of a kingdom of heaven upon earth. And the Christianity which came into the world as the professed fulfilment of these Heaven-born dreams is being challenged to fulfil them as never before. And Christianity can fulfil them just as we fill it with Christ. We need no violent agitation, no mere strife and cry, no revolution that outruns our moral preparedness for it. Let us think ourselves, pray ourselves into the spirit of Christ, and, by bearing one another's burdens, fulfil His law. It is in personal character acting upon personal character, in consecration and sacrifice that we shall see—

“The end lie hid in future victory,
Won by the faithfulness of man to man.”

WHEN WE CAN NEITHER FLY NOR RUN

“They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength ; they shall mount up with wings as eagles ; they shall run, and not be weary ; and they shall walk, and not faint.”

ISAIAH xl. 31.

IX

WHEN WE CAN NEITHER FLY NOR RUN

“THEY that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles.” Are there not times when this figure answers to our experience, describes our sensations as though it had been inspired to express them? St. Paul tells us of one of these times in his own experience when he was just as happy, as filled with ecstasy as man could be. He hardly knew whether he was in the body or out of the body. All he knew was that these were the most exalted moments of his life when, as he tells us, he heard things he could not, and must not if he could, report.

Have we passed through no experiences that give us a degree of entrance into the Apostle’s meaning? When some great weight of anxiety has been lifted off our life; when some impending calamity has been mercifully turned

aside; when we have read or heard something that has unlocked the prison doors of our doubts and fears—have we never in a great rebound of gladness known what it is to mount up with wings as eagles? We can look back upon moments, when we have had visions and revelations of the Lord which have not only left their impress upon the soul, but have changed the direction of our life. They have been as the flash amid the long dark; but, by what we have seen of God in them, we are heartened to trust Him for what we cannot see. Should it be thought a strange thing if we claim to have had moments of exaltation which answer to the figure used by this prophet-poet, “they shall mount up with wings as eagles”?

“They shall run and not be weary;” this indicates a more normal experience, and one that haps less upon the accident of temperament and circumstances. It suggests the lines that have fallen to us in pleasant places—that conscious strength which means a goodly heritage. “Our day,” says a much quoted writer, “is well over at thirty.” It possibly is and sooner, if its totality be what he assumes it to be. Life at thirty years of age and much later, may be, and ought to be, the

natural transition into the most strong, reliable, effective, and adequate part of its whole tenure. When the passions and enthusiasms of youth have steadied into the more mature experiences of the next stage, they resolve themselves, in the man who is worth world-room, into the excellences of each, without the defects of either.

When I hear a man sigh over his growing years and say, "I would I were a boy again," I suspect both his good sense and the value he put upon his younger years when he had them. There is nothing we need to watch and pray against more anxiously than the atheisms of middle age. Did middle life but cultivate faith in higher things with a margin of the earnestness it manifests in the pursuit of material success, it could not only achieve the most enduring personal satisfaction, it could also lift the collective life to a plane immeasurably higher than it is now. In quietness and confidence shall be your strength, says the prophet, and the mid-years is the time in which to incarnate that strength. It is then a man should have so brought his body under subjection, as to make it the divinely given instrument to work out the worthy purposes of a trained will, and a wise

and matured intelligence. We may no longer mount up with the wings of youth; but we can do something better—we can run as men and not be weary.

“And they shall walk and not faint.” To do this is to do much. We know how comparatively easy it is to be and do what we pray to be and do in our moments of exaltation. While, again, it should be possible to do a few creditable things when we rejoice in good health, good days, fortunate circumstances, and the consciousness that as our day is so is our strength. But what when we can neither mount up with wings, nor yet run? What when the most we can do is to walk—can we do it without breaking down? In other words, can we, though it has to be with cold, icy determination, maintain our allegiance to God and conscience amid so much that tends to disappoint, fret, and harden us? For a man to wage this struggle, and come through it with an uplifted head, and an unconquered soul, is to evidence a royalty as compared with which the aerial flights of youth, and the achievements of a well-placed and gifted manhood, are a vain show. I hold that a few such victories are worth all the apparatus of the present world,

How often, indeed, do we feel, without saying what we feel, that we are weary of being told to wait upon the Lord and to trust Him? If we know ourselves, we say we have trusted Him, and what has come out of it? If our sky is frowning and cheerless we have to provide our own sunshine or go without; if we are tempted we must furnish our own strength or fall; if we are weighed upon with trouble, prayer is but an added burden in the experience of its futility.

But let us ask ourselves, Do we trust God in the sense we should rely on the word of a proved and honourable friend? Do we trust God as our children trust us to provide them with daily food? Is not our trust, when we come to analyse it, a mixed obedience, a divided allegiance of mind and soul that gives neither us nor God a chance? There are a few things I claim to have proved as well as I expect to prove anything on this side of eternity, and one of them is, that when I have trusted God in any worthy sense of the word—while at the same time doing my own part—I have found that whether I could, or could not, mount up with wings; whether I could, or could not, run without being weary, I could do something better

and braver than either, I could walk and not faint.

“Leaving the final issue in His hands
Whose goodness knows no change, Whose love is
sure,
Who sees, foresees, Who cannot judge amiss.”

WHY PRAY?

“For your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask Him.”

ST. MATTHEW vi. 8.

X

WHY PRAY?

THE vital breath of religion is prayer. But what is prayer? There are two definitions which practically sum up all definitions that tell for anything. About one of them I have some misgivings; the other I accept without reservation. Take the former. Prayer, says a great theologian, is a "supposed means to change the mind of the person to whom we pray." In other words, it may be said to be the "power to bring to pass those things which otherwise could not be brought about."

There is, as I have hinted, an objection to this definition, or conception, of prayer which I do not go out of my way to find. I have to reckon with it because it is there; an objection that gets its weightiest reasons in reverence and trust. If they are not meaningless words when we say that God is all-powerful, all-wise, all-

good, then it must be a strange thought of God which appears to assume that He can neglect, or be indifferent about the interests of any even to the least of all His creatures. This change of mind, sought by prayer, I can understand in the relation of one man to another. I may by words and actions seek to change the mind or feeling of another toward myself, in order that this change of feeling may lead to a change of attitude. But I cannot understand the attempt to do this with the Almighty. If God needs to change His mind about anything, then we may repeat the ancient sneer as the modern despair, "Where is thy God?" In saying this, I do not forget that in the Bible we are told, "it repented God that He had made man." We may, however, believe in inspiration without accepting a particular form in which it is expressed. When this early writer, whoever he was, tells us that it repented God that He had made man, I read it as his way of accounting for the fact that human disobedience can stand between us and the Divine intentions concerning us. But whatever he may have meant, we cannot think of repentance, in the sense we use the word, in One Who knows the end from the beginning of

our life, and with Whom is neither surprise nor afterthought.

“The Almighty,” said David Livingstone, “knows His mind about me, and over that I need not concern myself. His mind is unalterable, because He is all-perfect. What I have to do is to find out by obedience what that mind is, and make it my own.” This, surely, is a more religious attitude towards God than the fretful anxiety which appears to think that wants will not be attended to, except as the result of perpetual begging. We do know something of God’s will; and if, by doing what we know, we make that will our own, we too shall say:—

“I would not have Thee otherwise
But what Thou ever art;
Be still Thyself, and then I know
We cannot live apart.”

The other definition of prayer I find in Sabatier’s definition of Religion. It is, says he, “an intercourse, a conscious and voluntary relation, entered into by a soul with the mysterious Power on which it feels itself to depend; and upon which the faith is dependent. This intercourse is realised in prayer.” Prayer, then, is the unceasing com-

munion of the soul with the Eternal Power on which it consciously leans, and knows itself to be dependent.

This communion must include two things—our dependence upon God, and God's dependence upon us. And when I speak of dependence upon our part, I use the word in its most literal sense. Just because God is all-wise and all-loving; in a word, because God is God, our every petition to Him must begin and end in the trust that says, "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt." Does this forbid our asking for what is known as objective good? There is a wayward son who has gone beyond our control, and if we seem powerless to lead him back into the things that belong to his peace, may we not take our sorrow to God and plead for His help? May we not ask for guidance and believe that we shall have it in some crisis in business, or in some new departure in life when we go out hardly knowing whither we go? If while there is life there is hope, even though the veiled shadow is so near, may we not fight it back, if we can, with our prayers?

In answer to this, I ask: Has not Jesus told us that "Our Heavenly Father knoweth what things we have need of before we ask Him?"

He *knoweth*; and this is not knowledge which begins and ends in Himself. That would not help us. But because He knows the things we have need of, Jesus does not tell us we are not to ask for them. We *are* to ask, not to change the Eternal mind, but to do what only this something called prayer can do—that is, to bring our mind into obedience and sympathy with the mind Eternal. And when we ask in this spirit, there is no limit set to what we may ask. We may plead for all spiritual and temporal advantage, in assurance that it will be given if Heaven sees that it is for our good.

Only if we do depend upon God we must keep back no part of the price. It must still be trust when we ask and do not receive in kind; and, indeed, when we do not appear to receive at all. We must bear in mind that Jesus pledges the Heavenly Father, not to the things we want, but to those things He knows we need. For any half-dozen men and women who have some spiritual perception of their needs, we are legion who are influenced only by what we call our wants. I have prayed in days and hours of sore want—prayers that at the time were not answered as I asked. But I know now they were answered accord-

ing to my need. I repeat what I have said: For what we may pray in Christ's name, there is no limit set. It may be for an erring son, for guidance in temporal affairs, and even for a life that seems to be ebbing out with the tide. Whatever evil threatens, whatever trouble is there, we are to pray against it. But at the same time, if we depend upon God we must just do that—*depend* upon Him. God is love, and if we pray ourselves into love of God, no prayer to Him shall return unto us void. The objective side of the answer may have to wait, but we shall see of the travail of our soul here and hereafter, and we shall be satisfied.

Then there is God's dependence upon us. We are to be workers together with Him. And the communion which is realised in prayer means, not that we ask Him to change the conditions of our service—it is to plead for grace to fulfil them. And it is here we may break the wings of our prayers. It is not necessarily either scepticism or unanswered prayer that often leads to the surrender of prayer, but its conscious uselessness because of unfulfilled conditions. We may cease to debate whether God has done His part, because we know only too well that we have not

done ours. It is amazing to listen to the "thoughtless, wholesale way in which people often plead to the Almighty, the richest and most spiritual promises of His Word, and actually expect their fulfilment without themselves bending their soul and will to one of the conditions on which they are promised or can be given."

Prayer, in the sense of words, can never be a substitute for exertion where prayer must be religion in act. A man stands up at a temperance mission and says—as I once heard a man say: "Lord, Thou canst make this town sober from to-night if Thou wilt." And the people said "Amen." Yes, God could have made the town sober that night on the principle that the bodies in their graves were sober; or, more correctly, on the principle that a machine is sober. Had the man prayed, "Lord, Thou canst help me to cast this evil out of the land by keeping it out of myself, and by fighting it in others" there would have been common-sense as well as piety in his prayer. What God *can* do, I know not. My concern is to find out by the experience of obedience what He *will* do; and once upon this track I shall realise that He will do in me, and through me, the immortal best I permit

Him to do—what I co-operate with Him in the doing.

“Your Heavenly Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask Him.” And yet we have to ask. For it is this asking to have what we imagine ourselves to want, which often reveals to us what it is we really need. Have we never knelt down to pray in one spirit and risen with another and better? And it was this other and better our Heavenly Father knew we had need of. Were we set, not to pray God into a different mind about ourselves, but ourselves into the mind of God, there would be no peradventure whether our prayers are or are not answered.

I believe that in answer to prayer there are acts of Providence in our life as objective as though in the whole world there were none other than our personal need. But the Divine purpose in us is character; and that which has to last for eternity must be well begun in time. Let us live with God, and if He does not answer our prayer in one way, it will be to answer it better in another. “Your Heavenly Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask Him.” And He Who has told us this also says: “Whatsoever ye shall ask in My name”—whatsoever ye shall ask that I

can ask for you—"that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son."

* * * * *

When the sermon was preached from which the foregoing notes are taken, one of my hearers, an intelligent and devout man, said to me: "I wish you had made it a little more plain that you not only believe in answers to prayer that reveal themselves in character, but also in answers which are," as he put it, "on the nail"; answers that respond to the moment and need out of which the prayer is evolved. I do believe in answers to prayer that are "on the nail," and it may be a help to some if I risk the proportions, and perhaps the consistency of this address, in a few plain words about the aspect of prayer to which my hearer referred.

I recall a conversation I had some years ago with an eminent minister, who had also some reputation as a theologian. "I tell my people," he said, "that true prayer for any promise is to plead for power to fulfil the conditions upon which it is offered. In the possession of this power and the fulfilment of the conditions, the promise is realised."

Does that, I asked him, leave a place for what we sometimes call particular or objective

answers to prayer, in the sense in which we speak of a "special Providence"? "It may," he replied; "but to my thinking the only answers to prayer that can be identified with the facts of daily life, and reconciled with a true spiritual philosophy, are not in kind but in character. The answers are in augmented being; not in burdens taken away, but in strength given to carry them."

This was said to me when I knew less about myself than I do to-day, and at the time it sounded formidable. I have to say now that, if this minister's representation of prayer to his people all turned upon its subjective effects, his teaching left a lack which, at times in life, can seem very much like the lack of all. It may be, I believe it is, true to the normal experiences of the Christian life, but there are experiences that are not normal. Take a case—and it is not an imaginary one. A man is in some great peril; or, say, he is face to face with some threatened calamity, and he prays: "Merciful Father, give me deliverance, and let it be at once or I cannot sustain existence." "And," declares he, "let scoffers and sceptics say what they will, deliverance out of my trouble came as by a miracle, and to attribute it to anything else than direct answer to my prayer would be

to profane my own soul." And why should it not be exactly as the man said it was? Is there no provision in what is called "eternal law" to grapple with a need that cannot wait on time? Then it is not true to say that "love and law are both the same." I know better. I know that God can put out His hand as objectively as the mother puts out her hand to restrain her child from mischief, or to save it from hurt.

And why not? You conduct your household according to certain rules of order. But should an emergency arise such as accident or sudden illness, you do not allow the order to override the emergency—order provides for emergency. I believe in answers to prayer that work out in the assurance, "My grace is sufficient for thee." I also believe in answers that say, "Thy faith hath made thee whole, go in peace." One naturally shrinks from saying much about his own personal experience of answers to prayer. Only the plain and reticent word, which seeks to give the net expression, no more and no less, to this experience, can make its testimony of value to others. I am conscious that I express myself but very inadequately when I speak of three or four places in my life, where it was necessary for me to have a plain

revelation from God in deliverance and direction. This had to be at once, and as recognisable and specific to my need as food is to physical hunger. Upon the belief that I have received as I prayed—just that, and not something else—have I, humanly speaking, built up the most responsible years of my life. Times and again when I have been, if not weary of my work, yet very weary in it, has a quiet conference with these experiences graded me up afresh in endurance, and heartened me to renewed effort. I, too, can say, “What I have seen bids me trust the Creator for what I have not seen.”

SHOULD WE CONFESS ?

“And she said unto Elijah, What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? Art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?”

1 KINGS xvii. 18.

XI

SHOULD WE CONFESS ?

WHAT was there behind this woman's question? The answer, whatever may be our interpretation of the story in which it occurs, must be simply conjecture. She may have associated the death of her child with some specific sin in her life; or it may have been a general consciousness of sin that had been awakened in her by the presence of the prophet. My impression is that it was both. When, with pathetic confusion of ideas, she cried out against the presence of the man of God, as if he were the actual cause of judgment, it must, I imagine, have been not only sin, but some particular sin that was brought home to her conscience. Something in her past had stepped out and become her present.

Is this to read into the question what cannot be justly read out of it? "Art thou come unto

me to call *my sin* to remembrance?" Is there no suggestion here of what is significantly called a "past" in this woman's life? And I ask the question in order to say that, whatever we have put into our past, out of that past in some form the whatever will come. We may not always be able to identify the consequence with its exact cause, but it finds itself in the sum of our being. We are always giving an account of the things we do whether they be good or whether they be evil. "The face of the Lord," we are told, "is against them that do evil." Against them how? Why, in the moral instincts, the innate judgments of their fellows; ah! and in the whole order of the human world. You may tell me that you have known exceptions; and I may remind you that exceptions are said to prove the rule. Rather than that, I affirm that if your exception, or exceptions, have time to prove themselves, neither you nor the generations which preceded you have ever met them; nor will they that are to follow.

Whether or not we believe in a personal God, we have to believe in something called law; and I have seen the law called retribution put its hand on too many men for me to be infidel to that Something behind the law which knows

what It is doing. In a powerful passage in one of his books Mr. Matthew Arnold contends that the current of things in nature does not help the wrong-doer, but mightily hinders him. This is true. Men may buy off certain consequences with what seems to the superficial to be success. But they will look back one day with amazement to see what they broke through to secure this success regardless of its cost.

Let us beware, then, of peopling our present with actions which can only be our accusers in that future when we shall sorely need a friend. This is a warning more obviously for those who are young enough to have as yet the matter very much in their own hands. But what of those of us who, older, have a past which is what it is? Are we on quite the terms with our conscience about it we could wish, if wishing could make any difference? Or have we to connect many an event as it comes out in our experience with this exclamation of our text: "Art thou come to call my sin to remembrance?"

This latter question is the question before us. What can we say about it? I will try an answer in the fewest words; for it is a matter about which a sensitive person does not choose to say much even to himself. But if any of us

have a "past," something which if known would imperil, if it did not destroy, our reputation; something which in all likelihood would make a serious pause if not a break between us and the nearest, it may be the dearest, relationships of our life—what then? If the past is becoming our present, and the question which for years we have been asking ourselves in secret must now be met in the open: "Art thou come unto me to bring my sin to remembrance?"—what can we do? What ought we to try to do?

I answer as one who would refer all things to a higher Power: get right with God about the matter, be it what it may. If we fear, not what we have done, but only the consequences of its being known, there is nothing more to be said from the moral point of view. We shall live under the sword until it falls. But if we accept our past because we have come to see the sin for what it is, and with mind and heart to hate it, not because it carries outward consequences but because it can strike with inward death, then leave the rest with God, and with whatever may happen. Repentance means more than consequences; the evidence of a genuine repentance is our utter willingness to leave the consequences with a higher ordering. If God sees it good for us that we

should be known as we know, it is His will and let Him do what seemeth Him best. If He has no sufficient purpose to serve in our character by this resurrection of the past, He will so order it that the dead shall bury its dead. If we are right with God; if we have repented of our sin and are bringing forth fruits meet for repentance in such restitution as may be possible to us—then see His will in whatever consequences we may have to accept, for they will be in mercy and not in wrath.

This is also the answer to the further question: What is our duty in this matter to others? What do we owe not only to God, but to man or woman for wrong done in the past? And I answer again, if we are right with God our conscience will tell us. If confession can only bring pain and serve no useful purpose either towards ourselves or others, then make God our Confessor, and what He does not see good to reveal, we too may hold in silence. But if we have a secret to the injury of others, then if we would be right with God we must be right with man. It must remain a secret no longer. For those things we have done in the past, far as they have hurt others, we may do something to atone, *and what we can do we must do*. But when done, there is something

behind it all for which we cannot atone. And this touches a vital place in Christianity. What we cannot do here, Christ has done for us. Whatever the present or future may evolve out of the content of the past, leave it with Him who was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities. Because of what Christ has done and suffered for us, with us God is at peace. If God has forgiven us, let us forgive ourselves. Consequences in some degree will come though we realise our peace with God. Neither our peace nor His forgiveness must interpret consequences into impunity.

* * * * *

It was once my painful duty to interview a man who was active in the affairs of the Church, and held in the highest esteem by those who thought they knew him well. Things were being openly said about him which, were they true, meant an utter severance with old friends and associations; which meant, in fact, social annihilation. "You will have no difficulty," I said to him, "in disproving these charges, and dealing as they deserve with those who have set them in circulation?" "The reports are substantially true," he answered quietly, "and I am glad the truth about me has come out. For

years I have been living a double life, and now the sword has fallen I have a peace I have not known this long while past. Do not misunderstand me," he continued earnestly, "I have had it out with God in the very sweat of blood. I have not asked Him, nor shall I ask my fellow-men, for any remission of the consequences of my sin. I will accept its penalty with contrition, but, I trust, with courage. I have no children, and my wife is gone beyond suffering. I have found peace with God, and now let the chastisement do its work." The man lived some ten years after this; years very near to the Saviour and rich in quiet unostentatious service. At his graveside there stood hundreds who had cause to bless the memory of one who, having fallen, had redeemed himself by the love with which he had been redeemed.

Those of us who have read—and who has not?—the exquisite story by George Eliot, entitled "Silas Marner," will remember how Godfrey Cass had kept from his wife the secret of a former marriage and the existence of a child which had never known a father. After sixteen years a circumstance arose which forced him into confession. Speaking to his wife he says, "Everything comes to light, Nancy, sooner or later. When God Almighty wills it, our secrets are

found out. I've lived with a secret on my mind, but I'll keep it from you no longer. I wouldn't have you know it by somebody else, and not by me—I wouldn't have you find it out after I'm dead. It's been 'I will' and 'I won't' with me all my life—I'll make sure of myself now." Yes—"When God Almighty wills it, our secrets are found out." And what he wills, as in the case just mentioned, is for our good. What God buries, let it rest; what He calls up from the grave of the past, let us bow to what He wills. We need dread His will only when we dread, not the sin, but merely the consequences of it being known.

Let this, therefore, be my counsel to you younger people. Beware of making to-day the enemy of to-morrow. Put nothing into your present which you will fear to meet in the future. And those of us who are older; who, although we have nothing in our past which has become a spectre of the present, have yet sad and bitter thoughts in our serious moments about many things we have done, and even more about the things left undone we might, and ought, to have done—let the truth take entire possession of our life; see everything in it, and it in everything: the way to God is still open. Let us hear as we have never heard before that

wondrous word: "Return unto the Lord and He will have mercy upon us; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon." The way to God is still open; take it without further hesitation. Then let past or present report itself as it may, right with God we will say:—

"I fear no foe with Thee at hand to bless.
Ills have no weight, and *tears* no bitterness."

THE INCARNATION OF INFLUENCE

“ For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.”

ROMANS xiv. 7.

XII

THE INCARNATION OF INFLUENCE

IF the former part of this statement was true in St. Paul's day, how much truer is it to-day? When he gave the truth this terse setting, the ends of the earth, as compared with what they are now, were immeasurably apart. Nothing amid the discoveries and progressive movements of the last half century has been more remarkable than the fact that Science has practically annihilated space or distance. It has so flooded us with a knowledge, and equipped us with the means of close touch with places and races, as to make the "uttermost parts of the earth" but a figure of speech. Our telegraphs, telephones, newspapers, and railways give us a cognisance of human society, which is out of all comparison with that of our fathers. We have become conscious of a vaster world outside us than

any generation ever dreamed of before, and we feel its impress in a way particularly vivid. We cannot, as the Apostle reminds us, be passive spectators of what is taking place. As the universe narrows we must expand; we must recognise, and learn to sympathise with, a wider area of success and failure, joy, and sorrow.

If, then, the truth that "no man liveth unto himself" is emphasised by the ever closer union with, and inter-dependence upon, one another the world over, it is not the less so when we come to our personal share in this great relationship. It has been said that the lifting of the hand sends a shudder to the stars; and if we accept this, not necessarily as said, but as indicating the law of vibration, can we doubt that something so potent as the spirit of man sends forth impressions less sensitive or far-reaching? Every healthy soul has a worth-discerning faculty; and while it may have to recognise an order or quality of existence it does not create and cannot destroy, it does recognise it. According to the nature within is the character of our influence without. It may work through actions, it may only be an atmosphere; it may be active or passive—it is there: "No man liveth unto himself."

Could anything, we are told, destroy the smallest particle of heat in one of those minutest unseen stars, it would beget a disturbance in the economy of the worlds no Leverrier could compute or conceive. And when any one of us withholds her or his gift, however humble, from the service of the world we misuse our gift in not using it, we keep back something which God and man needs in the building up of a sane, a saved, and a happy human society. Our gift, as compared with the richer endowments of others, may be as the star to the sun; but as the sun cannot say to the star "I have no need of thee," neither can we afford to rob the world of that in us for which life has no equivalent, nature no alternative. Great influences, says one, which we cannot understand, stretching over huge spaces of time, will make one man great as a "Mariposa pine, and another as small as a dwarf pear; yet in its degree this shall be as good as that, while the sun will shine, and the rain fall, and the blessing of heaven rest on both." A day, Emerson tells us, is a "king in disguise." And think what can be done, if we will do it, with a day. If our days are not kings, but beggars ragged and fugitive, it is because the rags are

upon us, not upon the days. In our homes, our friendships, our business pursuits, every turn meets us with the opportunity to hearten some one with a kind word and a pleasant look; the opportunity to manifest a spirit that radiates the "holiness of helpfulness." Every place may be the place where for some one we can do a brother's part: "for no man liveth unto himself."

"He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen," says another apostle, "how can he love God Whom he hath not seen?" What does this mean? If we would face the question for what it is, many of us would either profess less religion or practise more. It puts the proof of our love to God in our service for man. Just as we get "affected by close contact with live things at specific points," so this love is brought down to a specific object or person—the brother whom we have seen. We hear much in our day about loving and caring for humanity. But who can tell us what humanity is? What is called the "Religion of Humanity" may be the safest refuge of selfishness. If it means anything, it should mean the man closest to us, or the few who touch our life and receive our touch in return; and these for us are humanity, or for us humanity does not exist.

The best way—nay the only way—to know how to love the people who are furthest away from us, is to begin by loving and blessing the people closest to us. Unless we recognise this truth and act upon it, we shall never know what the “slumbering potentialities of universal love” actually are. Some very selfish men have written and spoken eloquently about the love of humanity; men who have only looked at humanity in the abstract and never touched it in the concrete. The sign of adoption into God’s family is in keeping an open and hospitable heart, so that the gladness of the glad may always enter in. It is worth our while to say this and to hear it, although I know that the people who can find a good denied to themselves in the good of others are all too rare.

“To this true saintliness few of us can attain, but we can try to approach it. We can all of us do much to keep our sympathies fresh and green, and to do this atones for many a defect.” Unselfish love—by nothing else can we be known as the children of our Father which is in heaven; for nothing else can yield us satisfaction or happiness worth the name. It is a commonplace to cite money in this connection. And when we reflect that money is the most ferocious pursuit of society as we

know it, the commonplace will bear repetition. Money can do much. It is useless, it may be folly, to affect to despise it, or to preach against it. And yet for any single hour of satisfaction there is in money used as an end in itself, there is a month of anxiety, and the sense of being mocked in a possession that promises so much and can fulfil so little. It is the same with our pleasures. Have them only for ourselves, and we never have them at all. Take a well-to-do family of young people who have little more to do than to amuse themselves, and are industriously living down to their privilege. Study that family, in its weariness, its silliness, its moral squalor—you may grieve, but you will cease to wonder that some problems lie a dead weight upon our civilisation, not to speak of our religion.

I would, if I could, lift a phrase that has fallen into the gutter of cant, and cleanse it for serious use. We have much to say at times about the "Simple Life": I wish we were determined to find the thing behind the word. For so many of us are living wrongly, and hence, dissatisfied with ourselves, we are jealous and suspicious of one another. Would that we could say: God has sent us here to make the best of where we are with what we have;

for accepting our place in simple trust in Him, we should find the good that is greater than the world's provocatives to envy; we should find the good that is independent of the world. Let us, then, just go on doing the best we can and the highest we know, and every step makes us more sure of God; and sure of God, we are sure of all that matters. With God in the heart it will be big enough and hospitable enough for everything that is God-like. We shall not be unclothed in what we have not, but clothed upon in the riches of others. Were I as sure of God as I pray to be, how I could shake hands with the world this day. All trace of envy, dissatisfaction, fear, and foreboding would be cleansed from my heart, while to every man, woman, and child I would say: I believe the best of you, and sharing your best you shall prove the best in me. And the cost of it all in things I may have to do without, will enhance the value of it all when the day dawns and the shadows flee away.

All comes back to the same truth. Nothing we do is self-contained. Every action is influential. That which we imagine is done in the secrecy of the soul is proclaimed on the housetops of our character. In passing the way we have never travelled before, and, as

far as we know, shall never travel again, we exercise an influence, and from its responsibility there is no escape. It is this which gives our life its correspondence with the infinite, for the infinite is in it.

What, therefore, is the moral quality of the influence you and I carry with us and leave behind us? We may refuse to come into close quarters with the question to-day, but there is a day fast coming when it will come into close quarters with us. "For," says the Apostle, "none liveth unto himself"; and he also adds, "no man dieth unto himself." We shall have company in that solemn hour. According to the things we have done, or left undone, will be our companions when heart and flesh fail. And what will it profit us then, whatever we have had of the lusts of the flesh and the pride of life, if, when face to face with Eternity, we lie surrounded with the company of our past sins and self-made failures? What pleasures or satisfaction will the retrospect of selfishness yield us, as each "forgotten fault and buried badness comes silently and sits down beside us"; as from each bloodless spectral lip there issues the word, "We are the familiars thou hast called out of thine own soul; and as thou couldst not

live to thyself, to thyself thou canst not die”?

But thanks be to Him Who is “able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy,” it may be all so different. It is in living for others that we find life. And if, when the day that shortens as we measure it closes for us, we know that some one will miss us; that we shall leave hearts behind us out of which that has gone which can never be replaced until they rejoin us on the other side; if, amid those last shadows just before the wondrous dawn, the angel faces of the good things we have done, or tried to do, are smiling upon us—what a passing it will be to praise the grace of the Saviour in His servant’s words, “No man dieth unto himself.”

What I am saying is just as true essentially whether we do, or do not, believe in a conscious, personal life beyond the grave. I know with what impatience many turn away from the insistence upon consequences that report themselves beyond this world, and in the same life. But let us remember, that while a truth may depend for some of its force upon a setting, no setting can give the truth its truthfulness. I believe that every thought we cherish, every

imagination we indulge, every action we do, will be with us in death, and with us will cross to the other side. Whether or not it be true, as the Orientals tell us, that we are part of all we meet, all we do becomes part of us. We may choose to think that the account closes down at what we call death, and yet have on our hands a truth hardly less awful. He would not be accused of undue sympathy with the doctrines I believe and preach, who put that truth in these simple but powerful lines :—

“There is a destiny which makes us brothers,
None takes his way alone :
All we send into the lives of others
Comes back into our own.”

THE HOUSE OF RIMMON

“In this thing the Lord pardon thy servant, that when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon ; when I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing. And he said unto him, Go in peace.”

2 KINGS v. 18, 19.

“Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple.”

ST. LUKE xiv. 33.

XIII

THE HOUSE OF RIMMON

PART I

IT was probably with a thin vein of curiosity running through a thick crust of scepticism and contempt, that this proud-sick and imperious man had turned to the Jewish prophet, as a man given up of his physicians turns to what is called a "quack," easing the strain upon his pride with the reflection that, if the issue left him no better, it could leave him no worse. But now he was cured and made whole. The healthy blood coursing through his veins sent a delirious sensation of joy pulsating through his being. His flesh, like unto the flesh of a little child, left him in no more doubt about his physical salvation than he had, who, centuries later, said: "Whereas I was blind, now I see." Naaman, too, could say: "Whereas

I was diseased, now I am whole"; and under the immediate influence of this wondrous change, we are quite prepared to be told that he said to Elisha: "Now I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel; and thy servant"—mark the altered tone in the man—"thy *servant* will henceforth offer neither burnt offerings nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the Lord."

But suddenly between him and the sunshine of his gladness, there fell the cold chill of a remembrance. While he was making his confession and the declaration based upon it, his thoughts were recalled to the life he had momentarily left and to which he must return. He would have to go back to Syria and with its mighty king bow himself in the house of Rimmon; bow to that which was now to him a vain idol, and nevermore a God. As the thought of the future loomed and darkened in his mind he knew better than to cherish illusions about it. His restored health would be an object of hatred to the priests of the popular religion, and his new conviction, or change of religion, so much fanaticism to the well-bred worldliness of Syria. Hence with sadly cadenced tones, with very tears in his words, he made appeal to the prophet: "In

this thing the Lord pardon thy servant that, when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing.”

So far as Naaman was concerned, and taking the position from his point of view, we are not very much surprised that he asked this concession to it. Our difficulty is the fact that it was granted. The request we can understand, but what about the answer? After having put the pride of this Syrian through a discipline so severe, and to accede to what looks like an overture to the old life—instead of admonishing him to avoid the very appearance of idol worship—has, on the face of it, the look of a dangerous compromise. How, then, are we to understand this answer? For myself, I do not interpret it as either approving or disapproving of the thing behind the request. I take it that Elisha recognised the difficulties of the position in which Naaman was placed, and his answer “Go in peace,” is but another way of saying: “Go back to Syria and there be all you can.” In other words, I regard it as the plain and well-advised statement of a principle running

through the dispensation under which he lived and taught.

What was this principle, and what was the dispensation? Without question the latter was one in which the Almighty tempered His demands to the various capacity of His people to keep them. Had He, in His moral education of them in old times, insisted upon that which we are apt to think the prophet should have demanded of this Syrian, He would not have been the God of an ever progressive order but the maker of chaos, and the author of despair. When our Saviour Himself was confronted on one occasion with these Old Testament permissions He very significantly answered: "Because of the hardness of men's hearts"—because of the crude and undeveloped state of their knowledge of higher things—God allowed what He did not approve; He did not sanction, He allowed these lower things.

How could it have been otherwise? Nature cannot have two mountains without a valley between; and God cannot demand the highest spiritual mathematics from a rude and ignorant people but stumbling their way through the first rules of their moral arithmetic. It is by this principle that we explain the polygamy of the patriarchs; the mistakes, and at times,

coarse and impulsive actions of men who otherwise stood head and shoulders above the average moral height of those about them. It helps us to understand why a man like David, with all his boundless self-permissions, should yet be called a man after "God's own heart." Many of the ideas, and certainly the practices, of these old Bible men would be anathema with whatever is decent in our day. In a marked degree they had the defects of their qualities. But they had the *qualities*, while those around them had little beyond the defects. This was the difference, and it is fundamental. They stood for the higher possibilities of the race; because they were morally usable God used them, and judged them, not by the light we have, but by the light they had. To try, therefore, to fasten these defects upon the Book that records them, or upon the religion which in the fullness of time is ours, is to write ourselves out of all just claim to imagination, sense of historical perspective, or, as I think, of common intelligence.

The same principle applies to our day. While we must not attempt to lower lofty standards, nor seek to modify our religious ideals, we must yet learn to take men as they are and as we find them, not as we may think we

should expect to find them. If we are not prepared to help the drunkard to become sober until we are assured that he will become sober, remain so, and be very grateful to us—we may spare ourselves the disappointment, and others the infliction of our complaints. It is by working upon men for what they are, that we grow into the faith of what they may be. This I take to be the meaning of the prophet's word to Naaman, "Go in peace." Not that he compromised with idolatry, but that he refrained, and wisely refrained, from demanding the impossible in circumstances where the possible would be terribly hard. If, when Naaman got back to Syria, he put the best there was in him into the determination to be what in the joy of his cleansing he had vowed before Elisha, he did mighty things. Life had to be lived after the vow, and, as the joy toned down, the difficulties would increase.

This, I say, was, and was bound to be, the principle by which God allowed men's actions, and judged them under that old dispensation. How far, then, and in what sense, does it apply to the new under which we live? How does it square with another and a key-word of Him Whose authority we hold supreme?

—“Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple.”

PART II

“Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple.” This has been called the last word on the conditions of Christian discipleship. If so, how are we to read it? We may forsake a thing in spirit—we may detach ourselves from its power, and yet retain, and rightly retain, its possession. To attempt to make this word of our Lord literal and despotic would be to disarrange the whole fabric of human society as we know it. And has not our Lord Himself warned us against all such wooden interpretations of His words: “The letter profiteth nothing: the words that I say unto you, they are spirit and they are life.”

Christ did not speak to all as He spoke to a comparative few. He ever had before His mind the promise and capacity of those whom He addressed. Take one instance of this: He did not insist upon Nicodemus and Lazarus, who, for their day, were fairly rich men, or upon Joseph of Arimathea, who was a rich

man, forsaking all that they had as a condition of becoming His disciples. But He did demand this of the rich young ruler. And why? Because the former could be better, or, at any rate, more useful men with what they had and where they were. It was very different, however, in the case of this rich young man who had it in him to do great things, and to become a first force in the new kingdom. He was hindered by what in the experience of these other men was a help. To insist upon this interpretation of our Lord's word, as applied in this special instance to the young ruler, and try to make it rigidly uniform, would be to deny to ninety-nine out of every hundred modern Christians any right whatever to the name or description.

Is this to say, then, that Christ accepts, and must accept as inevitable, the level of Christian life as we know it to-day? No, it is not to say this. We are held responsible, and rightly held responsible, not only for what we are, but what we may be. And this introduces another and a vital consideration into the question before us. Let us approach it through a further question. How are we average people, with such natures as ours in

a world like this, to live a life that can be justly called a life of faith on the Son of God? I have said that we are not only responsible for what we are, but for what we may be; and what we may be is what we ought to be. It is not a question of what we can do alone, but of what God and we can do together.

The earth, says John Ruskin, is full of lost powers. No soul perishes, he goes on to say, but if we could only read its true history we should find that not a thousandth part of its possible work had been done. Allowing for the characteristic way of putting this statement, there is truth in it. How many of us know that what we are, at what we are pleased to call our best, is but an instalment of what we might be by an honest response of the moral will to the offer of Divine grace and help? This does not mean that we are to seek hardships, to impose sacrifices upon ourselves, or to choose for ourselves a difficult and perilous path and insist upon taking that path. We are not asked to wilfully add to our burden, or shrink from such relief as the providence of life places within our reach and evidently intends us to accept. For the practical whole of us the admonition, "Love not the world,

neither the things that are in the world" simply means: "*Detach yourselves from the spirit of the world.*"

This is the secret, if secret it be, of a true and effective Christian life. Christ's call, as it has been truly said, "is a call to hold all gain and pleasure perfectly at the service of our convictions of duty, in obedience to the gospel of truth and righteousness." He always showed a tender and discriminating regard for differences in men. The severity meted out to the man in the parable was not because he had only one talent, it was because he did not use the talent he had. That severity was among the most gracious things ever offered to our race; it was the Divine emphasis upon the value of the average man. It means that the power of a new and better day is the incarnation of the possible, not only in a gifted few, but in the so-called ungifted many. It is the nearest we can get in this human world to the ideal life for which we were created; and which we individually and collectively are capable of reaching and realising.

And it is high time we began to think and talk sensibly about this most important matter. Too long have we had the pulpit mockery of setting forth a life and service we never expect

to reach and do not even intend to attempt. We have had more than enough of the impossible in our preaching, and the house of Rimmon in practice. It is often said that this is the necessity of our position, that the ideal is so great that our actual, when compared with it, must always seem poor and incomplete. This is true; but it is a truth that needs to be very carefully handled. Christ does not expect us to reach up to His standard; what He asks of us is just this—no more but certainly no less—Are we [putting our honest best into the climb? * Take an instance of what I mean: how many of us have more money than we need for the reasonable exigencies of our tenancy of this world? Nor would I say, give the main part of it here and there, and trust to the Lord to provide for us. God does not, except in rare instances, ask this of us. But He does ask, through a conscience for the *education of which we are responsible*, whether we are sharing fairly with Him in the claims of His Church, and the needs of Christ's poorer brethren? Face this question; and face it as it applied not only to money but to mind, to personality, and to possibilities of service in all its wide and varied degree, and how

* *Vide* Selected Note, p. 141.

many of us can look heaven in the face and say: we are doing, we have done, what we could? How many of us are, and we know it, bowing ourselves in the house of Rimmon, trying to buy off conscience with Naaman's word but without Naaman's justification: "The Lord pardon Thy servant in this thing"?

Let us not deceive ourselves. He cannot pardon us in the sense of imputing things to us as done which we have not even tried to do. God can forgive us neglect of opportunity, but God Himself cannot put back into our life what waste has lost out of it. He asks for no more than is demanded by a genuine excellence in things seen and temporal. To get the best we must give our best; anything less than this works out in some form of mediocrity, and self-made mediocrity is of the nature of perdition. There is all the difference and the distance between the saved and the lost, in a life that is lived for what it may be, and the existence of a mere hanger on in the house of Rimmon. "Had he been a poor half-and-half," says Carlyle of Knox, "he would have crouched into the corner, like so many others. Scotland had not been delivered; and Knox had been without blame." Can it be said of us, in the words of the Master's eulogium:

“ She hath done what she could ” ; or are we of the poor half-and-half, whose neither one thing nor the other does so much to make us all but impotent in the presence of any one of a half-dozen evils that rule, and practically curse, the world of our day ?

A SELECTED NOTE.

“ How,” it may be asked, “ is the position set forth in the latter part of the foregoing address to be reconciled with the other and emphatic word of our Lord : ‘ Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect ’ ” ? By way of answer I may be permitted to quote a few sentences which are none the less a quotation, because in places I have taken a few verbal liberties with them. It has been said that there is no more subtle test of the possible greatness of men intellectually and spiritually, than the measure in which they possess the passion for perfection. This is probably what Goethe meant when he quoted the phrase : “ Perfection is the measure of heaven ; and desire to attain perfection the measure of man.” The man or artistic temper cannot rest until he finds perfection, and, never finding it, cannot wholly appease his passion for work. Perfection of form has never been attained, except when the ideas which the artist attempted to express were, in a certain sense, limited. The passion for the infinite, which has often been called the peculiar characteristic of modern times, has found many noble expressions in all the arts, but has never, by reason of its own nature, found a final expression. It transcends the bounds of all forms of speech. It was for this passion that Browning was always looking

in the arts. He knew the value of the perfect line, but never for an instant did he identify art with the technical perfection. And this inevitable limitation, which all great artists feel, and which all great art reveals, is true in the development of character. "So many promising youths," says Emerson, "never a perfect man": not necessarily because a great many fail to fulfil the promise of their youth, but because no earthly fulfilment can realise what youth predicts. Men of the great moral achievements are pursued by a sense of inadequacy in themselves and their work. There is not room enough for immortality to work itself out under mortal conditions. The exact measure in which one feels the inspiration of this idea determines his spiritual conception of life; and one's power to receive the consolation which flows from it is, in a very true sense, the test of one's faith.

THE ADDED TOUCH

“ And I said unto her, Let me drink, I pray thee. And she made haste, and let down her pitcher, . . . and said, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also.”

GENESIS xxiv. 45, 46.

XIV

THE ADDED TOUCH

THE time had come when the son of promise should, as we say in our day, "get married and settle down." And accordingly, after the manner of Eastern custom, the father takes the matter in hand. He opens negotiations through his eldest, or most trusted servant ; for the description " eldest " in this case does not mean necessarily length of years, so much as proved capacity and wisdom. And to this man who " ruled over all that Abraham had," it was said : " Thou shalt go into my country and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son Isaac."

It is not every day, one imagines, that even in the East a man is sent forth to find a wife for another man. Nor is it an enviable expedition ; but if ever man had the right sort of sense for an errand so critical, here was the

man. As he took up his position at the well to take stock—if the phrase be admissible—of the women who came to draw water, we read that he prayed this prayer: “O Lord God of my master Abraham, let it come to pass that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down the pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink; and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also, may it be she whom thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac.”

“Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also.” She might be a good woman, fair to look upon, with many desirable endowments by gift of nature; and she might have said to him in looks rather than by words: “As thou hast asked of me drink for thyself, I cannot well refuse thee that.” If, however, she not only said, “Drink,” but added, “and I will give thy camels drink also”—that would reveal in her the *something* he sought in the woman who was to be the wife of the son of promise, and the representative mother in Israel. When we think about it we realise that, in the circumstances, this man could not have applied a more shrewd test to bring out the disposition of the woman. Let us then, for a minute or two, look at the *action* which so triumphantly met the test, and gave the

servant the answer to the prayer he had offered.

The *action*, I say, in the first place. For the hard and mechanical side of our actions is in the first part of his answer—"Drink." The grace, the poetry, the winsome and winning side is the finished form of it: "And I will give thy camels drink also." To read the latter part of the answer as but a bit of verbal addition, as the mere telling of one action that naturally suggests another, is to overlook something which goes to the roots of our individual and collective well-being.

We are told that not a little of the friction which seems chronic in the industrial world, is due to the regulation of labour on the principle of so much work for so much pay—less if possible, but certainly no more. This regulation standard does not apply to one particular world more than to another. It is not only the thing we do, but the way, or spirit, in which we do it, that determines the moral quality of its influence on ourselves and others. A woman came to me a few months ago, to tell me that she had been unjustly dismissed from her position in a nursing home. She knew I had some little influence in the home, and she asked me to use it, as her

“future in the profession was at stake.” When I mentioned the matter to the matron, she answered: “Nurse —— is a thoroughly capable woman on the routine side of her work; but she gives her patients the impression that with her it is all a matter of duty and nothing over, if it be only on the side of manner. And,” added the matron, “nothing so gets on the nerves of a sick person as a hard regulation manner in a nurse.” The matron’s answer reminded me of an illustration I met lately which is singularly apposite to the matter I want to urge. “Watch two persons,” says the writer, “arranging flowers in a vase. One just thrusts them in and leaves them. There they are, stiff, awkward, and to look at them, flowers though they be, ugly. The other gives them that dexterous, that nameless touch which, as by magic, sets off their beauty.”*

As in the matter of ministering to a sick person, or in arranging the flowers, there is something that makes all the difference between attraction and repulsion in what we say and do. Just as there is a little touch that can make the most ordinary action splendid; so is there a want of it that sends us away from some people, and the transac-

* Rev. Morris Joseph.

tion between us, with a shiver as we say to ourselves: "We have had the letter of the law, but not a suggestion of grace." This want is, as it has been aptly phrased, the added, or, "extra touch." Rebecca would have fulfilled all that was required of her in civility to a stranger had she simply complied with his request: "I pray thee give *me* to drink." The extra touch was in the gracious response with its accompanying action: "I will draw water for thy camels also, until they have done drinking."

Making happiness for others does not depend upon a few big things done occasionally, so much as the extra touch given to little things which, in the main, make up the fabric of our life. "Our mother died when we were young," said a lady to me once, "and our father, while a good man in what are called substantial ways, seemed to have a morbid dread of showing us any outward signs of affection. Had he been more sparing of his cheques and more liberal with his kisses, I should not have made the unhappy marriage I did; and my two brothers who are now said to be 'rotters' would, I am persuaded, have made useful men." This, let us hope, is an extreme case; but only God knows how much tragedy is made by the

withheld touch. How little this touch costs, yet what might there is in it. A line or two in a letter, a few words in a conversation—why, I have known times when these have made for me a new heaven and a new earth! We cannot all do what are called great things, but we all, as one well admonishes us, can give the smaller things that mystic touch that brings them near to greatness. The thing that God gives to us to do is the thing we can do; something which does not require a capital we cannot furnish of gift or of means. Our daily life can be made wonderfully effective by very little things. The light of the kindly spirit, which is a form of the heroic spirit, shines through the wrappings of education, or the want of it; of dogma or surroundings; and reveals to us the synthetic beauty and power in the simple touch above and beyond what is expected of us. The Koran makes a distinct class of those who are by nature good, and whose goodness has an influence on others, and it pronounces this class to be the aim of religion. And this influence never translates itself to better purpose, than through the disposition that breathes in these old words: “Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also.”

And in the second place, let us look a little

further, at what this action meant to the *future* of this woman. Little she knew that the man who said to her, "Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink," was the trusted servant of the father of the faithful, the representative man of her race. Little did she dream when she answered, "Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also," that her answer was the sign he had asked from heaven, and which put upon her from that moment the seal of her high destiny. Humanly speaking, that added touch changed the whole direction of her life, giving her, in exchange for obscurity, the premier position among the women of her race, and a sure place in its marvellous history.

And the added touch did nothing for this woman of old time, that it cannot do for you and me, if not in degree yet in kind. We never know what there is in any action we do, but of this we may be sure, there is *something*, and it never fails to report itself. Not always do we look upon the world in the same temper, or with the same clarity of judgment; but of this I am persuaded, taking things on a fair average, the world owes us less than we often imagine. As we give to the world, from the world we get. There are places where we do not come to our own; and just as our own

is worth coming to, we can do without it in the sense of an outward recognition of it. Enough for us that we are the "children of our Father which is in heaven," who find their own in what they are, rather than in what they have.

Taking life, however, on its more rough and utilitarian side, there are two things none of us can afford: one is to say of anything we do, "It doesn't matter"; the other is to ask: "Why should we do for others more than we are obliged to do—they will never thank us." To slip into either of these fallacies is to bring ourselves, sooner or later, into inquest with the kind of lie which costs very dearly. To reduce our existence, for life it is not, to a miserable science of only "looking after ourselves," is the most bitter and ironical form of self-defeat we can very well court.

Looking after ourselves in this sense is a fatal blunder even from a prudential standpoint. The world keeps no books; but it registers our actions in imperishable memories and impressions. It has its day after tomorrow; and to neglect to make friends until we want them is about equal to the wisdom of postponing life until after our funeral. I could mention cases which have come under

my own notice, where men have missed the chance of a life-time through something being remembered against them—a haughty look, a brusque temper, a selfish action. And I have known others out of what are called “accidents” rise to favour, place, and fortune; and these accidents have simply meant something again which has been remembered—the extra touch of a kindly and unselfish nature. Wherever men recognise in us disinterested service, a genuine desire to make life happier for others, we do more than achieve influence or reward; we “inherit it by a kind of spiritual reversion.” We find a world we have not sought, seeking us, anxious to force upon us a crown we are content to be without.

And once more, let us look at this action in what may be its meaning through us for the world of which we form part. The outlook upon the world through the eyes of religion can hardly be said to be reassuring. And the forces that are telling against us never impress me more seriously than when I read or hear some of the attempts to explain away, or soften down their more aggressive features. “It is true,” we are commonly told, “that the people in alarming numbers are falling away from the public worship of God; and apparently

from any fear of God." "But," we are further told, "we must not conclude because people are becoming increasingly indifferent about religion, that they are infidel to its truths."

I find but little comfort in this. Surely a religion worth the name can have no more deadly foe than indifference to it. Give us opposition to religion however passionate, if only it be sincere. There is movement, and consequently hope, where violence is seen; but if we could think of despair in God, it would be when all movement has closed down in indifference. And there is only one power in us which can attack this indifference, with the faintest hope of making any impression upon it; and that power is in self-sacrifice. A commonplace belief in God, moral theories about Jesus, a regulation or a sentimental religion, that seems to influence conduct even less than the transient emotion stirred by dream or romance, these are the content which first creates through us, and then confirms, this indifference in others.

We do not need conferences to debate, or committees to report on the reasons why men and women, not in tens and fifties, but in communities, are falling into an existence of mere animal pleasure, without intellectual stimulus or spiritual vision. We do not know the conse-

quences better than we know the causes of this great surrender. And we shall get at these causes, to get them out of the hearts of men, but, as I have said, by the old way of sacrifice. It is only by losing our life that we find it in ourselves, or in others. To do anything worth the doing for human life and character, we have to reckon with Calvary. That lonely cross expresses what is deepest in God; the very law of His Being and Life. As we are saved by blood, even the precious blood of Christ, by blood must we save. This is not to talk theology, only so far as theology sets forth a truth we can no more escape and still live, than we can be and not be at the same time. Even to bring down and incarnate the influence of the added touch on character, means the sacrifice of much that conscience will demand, much that reason cannot ask.

“What do ye more than others?” “Whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.” The world is only too well used to the regulation mile; and it is not impressed by doctrine or practice which gets its due credentials by being neither better nor worse than what is expected by the average religious life about us. But adorn the doctrine by the extra touch. Men expect the first mile, but having

done it, do another ; and that arrests attention, gets hold of the imagination, and finds a sure way to the heart. We say we believe in Christ, and men listen, if listen they do, with indifference ; but live Christ, and men love Him. Let us, therefore, seek for grace to show what wondrous power there is in every action which adds to the expected the surprise and beauty of the unexpected : “ Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also.”

GOD'S DREAMERS

“Get thee up into the top of Pisgah, and lift up thine eyes westward, and northward, and southward and eastward, and behold it with thine eyes; for thou shalt not go over this Jordan.”

DEUTERONOMY iii. 27.

“Faith is the assurance of things hoped for; the giving substance to things not seen.” (Literally translated.)

HEBREW xi. 1.

XV

GOD'S DREAMERS

I WANT us to look at the great Israelitish leader when, after forty years' wanderings in the wilderness, he had come to the end of his days. All that time, nay that time twice told, he had toiled for the fulfilment of his purpose. He had endured much, he had sacrificed all that men count dear to themselves, because the faith was in his soul that, the people he led would reach the promised land and become a great nation. Then, at last, when the land was in sight, Moses knew that for him all was over; that he would never enter that better country he had made the great surrender to reach. After all these long, trying years of nothing but faith, he was to die in faith, not having received the promise, only having seen it afar off.

In these circumstances it sounds like irony to tell us that "God's angel kissed him, and he slept." But this may be more than a pretty

expression. As this early path-finder breathed his last he no more doubted that the people, for whom four-score years before he had pawned his great position in Egypt, would live on the land and become in some way what he had wrought for, than if he had already seen it dotted with towers, studded with towns, and covered with the evidences of enterprise and prosperity. Faith realised what did not exist; and for eighty searching years "faith was the assurance of things hoped for; the giving substance to things not seen."

And yet, if we had read this story outside the Bible, and our imagination were quickened over a like experience in patriot or leader with a more modern name, we should speak of him as a man harshly used by fate or fortune. We should think of the kingdoms of this world and the glory of them, which he had surrendered; we should look at those years of intolerable association with a rude, gross people willing to be back in slavery so that they had meat and drink in fair abundance. And what was the apparent reward of it all but this, to—"behold . . . not go?" We should say to ourselves, we should say to one another, "and all the earnings of his pain—to see, not to possess!" "For thou shalt not go over this Jordan."

But when we reflect upon it in the light of history and, if we have any experience worth the name, in the thought of that experience, we begin to realise that there was nothing exceptional, unless it were in degree, in this leading of God. It is part of every life which approximately answers to the purpose for which life is given. The great men of the world are they who see further than they can go, who have in their soul what they never have in their hands. As Goethe says, "Their yonder is never here." They see a day when the ancient prophecy shall have its modern fulfilment; when "for ashes there shall be beauty, for mourning the oil of joy, and for heaviness the garment of praise." And Moses was a great man. He did not accept the decree, "For thou shalt not pass over this Jordan," without question. But he did accept it; and changed worlds with a soul full as ever of its dream country, while as yet not a sod was turned of the land that was to flow with milk and honey.

It is a wondrous thing in this world of ours, where the looms of time are endlessly weaving their fabric of sense between our soul and eternal realities, to see a man who sees, and to hear a man who has heard the beats of the deeper music. For, account for it as we may,

the seeing eye and the hearing ear are given but to the few. It is in our spiritual phenomena to-day, as it was in the day when of the voice from heaven, "some said it thundered, others said, Nay, but an angel spake to him." I once heard the great orator of the nineteenth century make a speech in which occurred a passage which is now quoted as classic; and talking about it afterwards with one who was present at the meeting, he answered quite frankly, "I was not listening at the moment; the truth is, I was calculating how much machinery the building would hold." Many a worthy Israelite might have stood on that lonely height with Moses, and have seen only a land eminently desirable for material purposes. But the faith vision of the great leader realised a splendid civilisation which as yet was not, grasped coming events as though they were present facts, laid mighty bulwarks, reared splendid palaces, built a very city of habitation, where to other eyes there was nothing but space, with here and there the furtive movements of a beast of prey. "Faith," says the writer of the letter to the Hebrews, "is the assurance of things hoped for; the giving substance to the things not seen."

Let us, then, not be unduly cast down, if our

suspicious begin to harden into certainties that we shall never enter into the promised land of many a desire, perchance of many a prayer. Let us stand upon our feet that God may talk to us, though our place and limitations tell us that "we shall not pass over this Jordan." Have we any vision of things past the seen and temporal? then let us watch and pray to be favoured with a "good degree of stillness." Or, if we are conscious that not to us is the vision; if we are weighed upon with what it is the fashion to call "realism"—which does not always mean real things—have we any belief that there are men who do see the visions, and dream the dreams we would have come true? For the worst paralysis that can seize a human soul is not its own inability to see, but its inability to believe in the vision of another. The atheist is not he who cannot himself find God; it is he who meets with contempt the testimony that any one has ever found Him.

Hence I would plead, in the name of that faith without which no man shall see good, against the temptation to fall below our just stature in taking our estimate of the present, and giving our hostages to the future. It seems to me but religious suicide to assume that everything about which we cannot lace our fingers is

uncertain, and that the least stability of all is when we would enter the realm and requirements of faith. We must get our feet upon the truth that some things have been settled; that there are some facts of religion that can no more "flux in the fires of the crucible of criticism, than gold can be melted by the flicker of a fire-fly." If God has put into our soul any visions or signs of a greater day, then let us walk in the light which is the light of all our seeing. Blessed are we if we behold, though we may not go. If we are true to such heavenly vision as is vouchsafed to us, we may safely leave ourselves with Him at whose right hand are the eternal years.

In the first place, then, it is for us to take this stand who are engaged in the *secular* work of the world. And while I hesitate over this word "secular," as distinguished from "religious" or "sacred," I use it for a moment in a sense that will be understood. There is a teaching very much in evidence to-day which assumes that all our knowledge is derived from the senses. We know nothing, we are told, but what from our reasoning faculties we conclude that we "touch, taste, see, or hear." It is a teaching that underlies much that is known by many names; and it takes

the glory out of life. It has no outlook into the invisible world here or hereafter. According to this teaching, man has neither vision nor volition; he is simply a billiard-ball which goes whithersoever the cue sends it. Into whatever such teaching bites death lives and life dies. Dreamers and idealists are regarded as cranks; and those who create trouble about principles, as nuisances. Selfish getting is the ground colour of its universe; it is the gold that sanctifies its temples.

The world is divided sharply as ever into "drudges and dreamers,"* and as we take away the latter only the former are left. We are told that "where there is no vision the people perish," and this is not a truth outside the range of common life. It does not belong exclusively to the inner communion of God and man. It has everything to do in the affairs of man with man on the everyday levels of life. For the conditions of all life worth living do not change. They invariably ask for the same things—the clear eye, the fervent heart, and the resolute moral will; and these are needed and may be found in work we call secular, as in the seekings we speak of as sacred. The world needs

* Dr. Lyman Abott.

nothing so much as men who carry the spirit of vision into the "trivial round and common task" of its everyday. The man who works without vision, who is not lifted up by his thought out of material things, may be a very great philosopher who tells us that we know nothing, and can know nothing but what we "touch, taste, see and hear," but he is none the less a drudge. Without vision a man may hammer on an anvil, or he may do something less useful than that, he may hammer on the desk of a pulpit; he may paint pictures, or he may paint lamp-posts—it makes no difference. If he has no vision, and no capacity to be inspired by the vision of others, he is a drudge. Take vision out of life and life is gone. What you have left is an existence that has cast its holy things to the dogs, its pearls to the swine.

Where had been the world in which we make our boast, but for the dreamers? What are called practical men scoff at them, as their sort scoffed at the world's Redeemer when He hung upon the cross. Do they know that they are practical men only because they make the drudge's use of the marvels that have come out of the dream? To them the mechanism by which they have made their

money is a reality. This is something practical. Yes, but it was once a *veiled* reality; who unveiled it? In his suggestive essay on the scientific uses of the imagination, Professor Tyndal shows how Science owes its progress to this power of vision. Copernicus, Newton, Watt, Stephenson, Faraday—all the great men in science saw dimly and imperfectly the invisible realities, followed, tested, tried their visions and proved them for what they now are to us. I do not say that they saw these realities in the developed forms in which we have them; but their yonder is here because they could behold where they might not go. Their faith was their assurance of things hoped for; the giving substance to the things seen only as yet in a dream.

We must take this standpoint again in distinctively *religious* work. The only evidence worth having of a "call" to the highest service is the power to "behold" further than we can go, and in the strength of this vision to act as if it were realisation. There will be times when we shall feel as the disciples felt when they looked on the multitude, and then at the few loaves and fishes: "What are they among so many?" What can we do against all this wrong and selfishness?

Who are we to hurl ourselves against the huge battalions, which not only see wrong but have shares in its inquisition of blood? Well, we can believe that it is wrong, and we can learn to hate it with our immortal soul. It has been truly said that the more we see and feel that which is wrong in theory, the more keenly shall we feel that which is wrong in practice. The more clearly we see the glory of the yonder, the more pitifully shall we regard the sorrow that is here. We can, I say, hate the wrong, and we can vitalise our hatred and keep it active by the faith that, although the evil may not pass away in our day, we are working for its overthrow; and overthrown it shall be, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it, and the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.

We can do more: we can encourage ourselves by what has been done. Were we better students of history, and wiser interpreters of the passing days, we should be better faith men and wiser theologians. Count up the gains for truth and humanity which have been won in the life-time of many of us. See how this restriction and that wrong have disappeared as the touch of justice has broken the pretensions of time and power.

What though we see but small results from our labours, if we have a good conscience that we would be, and are trying to be, obedient to the heavenly vision, let us fall back upon the truth that it is not to success we are called, but to the work. If we do our part God will look after the success. "Little Monk," said one of the grim barons that guarded the door of the Diet of Worms—"little Monk," said he to Luther, "thou hast much need of courage this day. But if thou believeth that the word thou hast to say is of God, then in the name of God go forward and say it." Luther, we are told, paused and looking up as one who had heard a voice from heaven—which, indeed, he had—straightened himself and exclaimed, "That is the message to me! yes, in the name of God, forward!" When we look at the world through the eyes of sense only, we see it sinking as if under the influence of a bad sky. The evils that confront us are appalling, the difficulties are overwhelming. But if we have inward vision, a living faith that the work we are trying to do is of God, then in the name of God—forward:—

"On to the bound of the waste,
On to the City of God."

It is wisely decreed that in this life we should for the most part "behold, not go." When we are where to be we are content, we have begun to turn back. It is a great quest that is set before us, a life-long endeavour, a perpetual effort. And yet it is not always true to say that the "yonder is never here." There are eras of hope fulfilled, there do come times of finished work, and of achieved success in earthly enterprise. But in the larger aims of our ideal life this can never be the case. A future and immortal life can have no meaning apart from the truth that there must always be before us a better than our best. "I know," remarks a wise thinker, "that the history of discipleship has always its two sides. On the one side a divine restlessness, on the other a divine rest." Here it echoes the language of Paul: "I press toward the mark;" there it enters into the bequest of Christ, "Peace I leave with you." The next worst thing to doing nothing for Christ and the world is to be satisfied with what we do; then our work is done and death is at the door.

Better, far better, go on working and dreaming, and praying, with an occasional glimpse at our promised land; with here a

flash and there the dark, but amid it all the knowledge that what we are becoming in the seeking is something inexpressibly greater than ought that could have come to us in an earlier finding. We shall soon be through the brief day that shortens as we measure it, and I, for one, would have no other desire than so to tire myself in it that when I sleep I shall sleep well. In the meanwhile let us give diligent heed to the wise admonition:—

“Say not, the struggle nought availeth,
The labour and the wounds are vain,
The enemy faints not, nor faileth,
And as things have been, they remain.

If hopes were dupes, fears may be liars,
It may be in yonder smoke concealed
Your comrades chased e'en now the fliers,
And, but for you, possess the field.

For while the tired waves, vainly breaking,
Seem here no peaceful inch to gain,
Far back, through creek and inlets making,
Comes silent, flooding in, the main.

And not by eastern windows only,
When daylight comes, comes in the light:
In front the sun climbs slow—how slowly!
But westward, look, the land is bright.”

NEED POVERTY BE PERMANENT?

“For ye have the poor always with you.”

ST. MATTHEW xxvi. 11.

XVI

NEED POVERTY BE PERMANENT?

WE are living in times of great unrest ; and this unrest is not confined to any particular portion of what is called the civilised world. In the East as in the West it is part of a vast struggle ; part, indeed, of that which has ever been since we had any trace of man, or knowledge of things below man. When history, as I once heard Henry Ward Beecher say, from the very faintest period spread her sheet to write, this struggle of "extrication" was to be discerned, and step by step up the ages there has been no peace to last, no settlement that is final. We hear the Apostle declaring with characteristic insight : "The whole creation travaileth in pain together until now."

The word is well chosen : it is the struggle of extrication, and the form it is taking to-day is revolt against the conditions that make, and are

made, by poverty. Nor can it be said with justice that this revolt is either premature or to be wondered at. I, for one, will not say that any resentment against physical poverty is reprehensible where that poverty is not self-made, and where it does not by an ill-advised violence play into the hands of selfishness and reaction. And this latter remark suggests two things we shall do well to consider. We must be on our guard against men who are always ready to use our social troubles to further sinister ends; and we shall do well to take heed how we hear and accept statements about the causes of poverty, and use them as charges and reproaches against the poor.

When we do try to get at these causes we expect to find that drink, betting, improvidence, and consequent lack of producing and purchasing power, figure out very prominently among them. I have heard the statement made and repeated that quite 70 per cent. of the poverty in Britain is due to prevalence of these destructive habits and vices. If this be true, it can hardly be a matter for surprise that many of us should be ready to say, "The poor, to the extent of 70 per cent., are the makers of their own poverty; let them, therefore, bear their own self-made burdens."

But let us, in all fairness, further ask, Is it Christian, nay, is it human to accept a statement so serious as this unquestionably is, without being at any pains to find out to what extent it is reliable? Mr. Charles Booth, or to give him his proper description, the Right Hon. Charles Booth, whose work in seventeen volumes on the "Life and Labour of the People" is a standard authority, states that after a careful analysis of four thousand cases of the poor, and the very poor, 18 per cent. only could be traced to drink, thriftlessness, or other like evils. Twenty-seven per cent. was due to illness, large families, or to circumstances which are always at the mercy of accident and no work. As touching the last we are told that 55 per cent. may be assigned to unemployment. While again, in the class just above the very poor, 68 per cent. must be attributed to questions of unemployment, and 13 per cent. traceable to drink or thriftlessness. Mr. Booth comments on these figures and says that their proportion is one which he has no reason to think any further investigation would alter.

Let it be understood that these figures and their setting are a quotation. It may be that with regard to poverty made directly and *indirectly* by the drinking habits of the people,

these figures should be received with caution. But so should statements to the effect that 70 per cent. of our poverty is made by one class of vice alone. Poverty in itself is grievous enough to bear, and he who undertakes to discuss its causes may be reasonably expected to evidence some little knowledge of the subject—even if it be too much to look for a little sympathy with those who suffer it. No one deplures more than I do this insane indulgence in drink with all its concomitant evils. They set up nothing but enmity, and that of the most destructive kind, between the inner dignity and the outward surroundings of vast masses of men and women. For not only do these slaves of drink hurt themselves, they injure others, and that intolerably. In the most subtle ways, and in all classes, drink makes straight paths for those compromises with evil that are the despair of good.

But this said, let us not, in our hatred of this thing, become the echoes of people who have their own reason for telling themselves, and us, that the poor are the makers of, and hence responsible for, their own poverty and misery. If I were to say what I think of the men who make this kind of statement, and the people who accept it, I should use some very plain terms. I will content myself with quoting again a few words

from one who writes with acknowledged authority on the causes of unemployment and poverty. The main causes, he believes, are : "The unequal distribution of wealth ; the denial of access to the land ; increasing national and municipal expenditure ; neglect of technical and secondary education ; our failure to grapple with unemployment as a national question ; lack of proper oversight in the upbringing of children ; timidity in handling such great social questions as housing, sweating, and the control of the traffic in drink."

I am not about to discuss these alleged causes of our social and national troubles. To attempt this would be take a questionable advantage of this address. But in this connection there are a few further figures I should like to quote. I put this strain upon your patience because I want them to suggest a little pause for thought before we make ourselves judges of our fellow-creatures, who are little better than prisoners of poverty. Roughly estimated, there are in these Islands $1\frac{1}{2}$ millions who can be classed as rich, $3\frac{1}{2}$ millions comfortably off, 38 millions of poor, of whom 13 or nearly 13 millions are in constant need, the latter figures meaning people who, somehow, have to exist below what is called the food-line. Think what these figures

180 NEED POVERTY BE PERMANENT?

represent in low physical stamina, depression, hopelessness, despair, and hideous temptation.

What are we to say of this appalling state of things? And how are we to attack it? If we have the shadow of a right to call ourselves Christians, can we say, dare we think, that it is the will of God that this existence of those made in His image should not only be possible, but an actual and even chronic reality? I have more to say about this before I am through. For the present I want us to face the question put in these terms: How are we to attack this huge mass of misery, poverty, and semi-poverty, with any working faith that we can first lessen it, and then, sooner or later, get the dangerous excrescence out of our collective organism?

The answers are legion. Take the one now very much in evidence, that of Socialism. This, according to its disciples, is not a remedy for our troubles; it is, economically, the only one. If I subject this answer to a word or two of criticism it will not be because I am out of sympathy with it. Christianity can have no quarrel with Socialism save where it is so interpreted as to strike at the moral imperatives of a religion or society worth the name. For we must not lose sight of the fact that a change which is to turn our social system, as we know

it, "inside out," must include everything that relates to civic stability and organised society. And this is a big order. I am not about to consider "Christian Socialism," or "Evolutionary Socialism," whatever either may mean. If Socialism has grades, modulations, and qualifications, it is not Socialism but something else. Whatever else Socialism may mean, it must include two things: the absolute control by the State of all production and distribution of the means of subsistence; and that every man shall hold whatever endowment he has by nature at the service and as the property of the State in its corporate entity. It means that a man shall have the right to do as he likes with this order of values, only as he likes to do what the State thinks right. It means, in a word, that every member of the community shall put into its service the utmost he now puts into what he deems to be his own personal interests.

Whatever this may be worth in theory, we shall need to make a mighty advance on human nature, as we know it, to get the theory into a decent practice. If this, however, be an objection to Socialism, much more so is it to Christianity. Indeed, this is where Christianity strikes in. It demands all that Socialism asks for, and infinitely more. As measured with, or

182 NEED POVERTY BE PERMANENT?

against, Christianity, Socialism is a tame business—a very catena of irritating limitations. The former not only sets before us the highest order of mutual relations, but the highest order of individual blessedness which man is capable of reaching and realising. It is the only provision we have against the awful danger there is in satisfied and realised ambitions. The test of Socialism would be, not in changing the bases of Society, but in whatever temporal prosperity might wait upon this achievement. There is something in plenty which can be a greater menace to Society than poverty. And Christianity does not cast out one evil only to make room for another. It does not merely fight poverty and misery; where Christianity is it makes them impossible.

What, then, about the declaration of our text? Have we it not on the authority of Christ Himself that “the poor we shall always have with us”? I answer that probably no word of Scripture has been more persistently misused than the one before us. It has been misquoted and perverted in the service of the selfish inaction of the comfortable classes, and in the interests of a policy of letting things alone. There is no “shall” in the text. What our Lord said was this: “The poor always ye have with you.” The

statement was declarative, not enactive. Jesus was neither laying down a law nor was He pointing to one; He was simply stating a fact. He was not decreeing things as they must be, but describing things as they are. Because we say that some form of disease has been common to the human body hitherto, must we be understood as making the statement that it always will be? Science and intelligence are at work, and they will have something to say in the matter.

He who used this much-abused saying knew how poverty with its miseries would disappear in the measure His spirit and teaching were incarnated in the world. I read lately that, "The Churches had done practically nothing to better the social conditions of the masses of the people." It would be truer to say that, while they have done much less than they ought and might have done in this direction, they have yet directly, or indirectly, done all that has been done. But I quote this remark to enable me to say that we must not always confuse Christianity with the Churches, any more than we must always confuse the cravings of the flesh with the aspirations of the spirit. In the case of multitudes of us who call ourselves Christians—and for many things have a right to call ourselves

184 NEED POVERTY BE PERMANENT?

Christians—Christianity is yet in its grave. So far from being a failure, it has never been adequately tried. If a case can be shown where Christianity, according to Christ, has been tried, and has failed, I, for my part, will undertake never again to speak in its name.

But I know very few, if I know any, who are Christians in this profounder sense. I know this—I am not. I do not know how to take my life and lay it down for those farthest away from my tastes, my education, and from my social sympathies. I do many Christian things, and many others can say the same, with more warrant to say it than I have. This is good so far as it goes; but how many of us have imitated our Lord, who, “though He was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we through His poverty might become rich”? Ponder over one recorded incident in thought of what I mean. We read that on a certain occasion when He had washed the disciple’s feet He gave the application of this acted parable: “Ye call Me Lord and Master, and ye say well, for so I am.” To quote Henry Ward Beecher again, it was “a moment when He felt the whole influx and grandeur of His divine nature,” and He said, “If I, then, your

Master and Lord, have washed your feet, so ought ye to do to others as I have done to you." The same Master and Lord is washing the feet of creation to-day, caring for the poor, the helpless, the needy, the wretched, and the sinful, and He says to you and me who believe on His name, "I have given you an example that ye should love one another as I have loved you."

Yes, this is our example. This is that nature that has yet to be evolved, not in individuals only, but in all classes alike, until there is not a change of circumstances only, but a world itself changed—a new and glorious development of the higher idea and life. And we might as well attempt to alter decimals as to try to remake society without this remake of men. If we had a brand new social system to-morrow with the old selfishness, we should be back upon the old conditions the day after. I defy any man to be a good collectivist without being a good individualist, as I defy him to get a perfect whole out of imperfect parts. Nothing but the new life in Christ can radically change character, and nothing but radically changed character can give us a changed and better world.

Yet to say this is not enough. It is true to

say it, only, unfortunately, it is received as orthodox; and it is under cover of the latter that we readily ride off back into selfishness. St. Paul tells us that "if we have not the Spirit of Christ we are none of His." But in the degree we have His Spirit will our conscience be educated, and our standard of service immeasurably heightened. There is no sphere in life that should not be one of the "places of His dominion." And once let us get into our mind and heart a more Christ-like conception of the mission of Christianity in the world, and we shall have no misgivings about the Church bending her energies to further whatever has to do with human well-being and progress. I am far from believing that circumstances and surroundings can save a man. Nothing but a Power not ourselves and greater than ourselves can do that. But I do believe that circumstances and surroundings can do much to damn a man. And if Christ has saved us, we shall not need to be told that the least our day can claim from us is to do whatsoever our hand findeth to do to make the conditions through which this saving grace can have free course and be glorified in the lives of others. Some three or four years ago a working-man, who had

taken to drink, said to a friend of mine who had shown him sympathy and attention: "You see, sir, my wife and I don't hit it off; we have two such different tempers, and what with my home and monotonous work through the week, when Saturday comes I drink, not so much for the drink, but for the feeling it excites. I want to be, if only for an hour or two, something else than the miserable brute I am." My friend, who is an educated and a busy man, said to him, "Could you find pleasure in my company; would it help you to fight your craving when it is upon you?" "If I may but come to you," said the man earnestly, "I think I could win through." *And won through he has.* "Then shall the righteous answer Him, saying, Lord, when saw we Thee an hungred, and fed Thee? or thirsty, and gave Thee drink? When saw we Thee a stranger, and took Thee in? or naked, and clothed Thee? Or when saw we Thee sick, or in prison, and came unto Thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me."

JESUS: NOT JOHN

“And King Herod heard of Him; (for His name was spread abroad :) and he said, That John the Baptist was risen from the dead, and therefore mighty works do shew forth themselves in him.”

ST. MARK vi. 14.

XVII

JESUS: NOT JOHN

WHY should the rumour of these mighty works of which the king had heard stir in him the memory of that cruel deed? Rather ask, why conscience makes cowards of us all, for it was conscience that spoke. The disciples of John had "taken up his body and laid it in the tomb," but, according to Herod, the prophet was not dead. Upon the flimsiest evidence, nay, upon no evidence at all, this man, who probably denied any resurrection from the dead, said: "It is John, whom I beheaded; he is risen from the dead."

How easy it is to bring into our life that which we can never cast out; to raise ghosts we can never lay. And think of the grim irony of this case in point on things human: "Among them that are born of woman, there hath none risen greater than John the Baptist."

This was the eulogium of the Christ upon His Forerunner; and the head of that Forerunner was used to reward the artistic agility of a dancing girl. One motion of Herod's hand on that fatal night took off the prophet's head; and, the moment after, not the half of his kingdom, not a world's ransom could undo that deed which, to the king's dying hour, might keep him company as with the doom of the damned. "It is John, whom I beheaded; he is risen from the dead."

"Our acts our angels are, or good or ill,
Our fatal shadows that walk by us still."

We may imagine that we lose them for a time, but they never lose us. The very line of deflection from the straight line becomes the guide to retribution. Whatever else men may appear to escape, they never escape the consequences of what they do in one form or another. We know how readily the world subscribes to the superficial side of the maxim that "nothing succeeds like success." And when men who have exchanged their life for what they call their world, roll past in their chariots of appearances and self-importance, we send after them exclamations like these:

“What fortunate men! What extraordinary success! Fortunate men!” Faust was a fortunate man until it suited Mephistopheles to insist upon his side of the bargain.

When our fathers in the pulpit had to face the apparent contradiction of evil men having so large a slice of the good things of this world, while good men were often sent empty away, they said, “Sinners may escape the rod here, but it awaits them hereafter.” Is the former part of this statement true? Do sinners escape the rod even here? Does this sum up our observation of human life? We must not decide only on a prosperous exterior, we must know what moral deterioration has to say about it. “Escape the rod.” Never believe it. The devil takes good care that those who ask for it shall have it to the quick, and it is neither oil nor wine that he rubs into the wounds. Dives had his good things here, and Lazarus evil things; but it is not talking for mere effect to say that even here Dives was the cursed man with all his pomp and luxury, and Lazarus was the blessed man with all his rags and wounds. Sooner or later every man comes to a place in his life when he must find his happiness or its opposite, not in what he has, but in the conscience of how he came by

it. The day is also coming when all tainted success will mock as only a bad record can mock, when there is but time left to regret and none to retrieve the past.

But about this question of conscience. As there may be, we are told, an over-emphasis on sin, so may there be an over-strain put on conscience. A man's conscience is what he allows it to be. It can become by cultivation sensitive and inflamed; it can by a little healthy neglect practically cease to be heard or felt.

They who talk in this fashion mostly talk for what they are, and they are for the most part what the Bible bluntly calls them, fools. Conscience in a man may seem as dead, but he never knows what turn in existence may bring him into grip of the truth that there is a resurrection of the dead. Nothing in life is unrelated; and whatever we do, which cannot pass the bar of our higher self, to us is sin. It may sleep to-day, but it sleeps to wake. When we can least afford it, it will be more than awake; it will be hungry. They play with words who tell us that conscience may speak with two and very different voices in any two men, and over a like transaction. Conscience never speaks with two voices. We know what

wickedness is to us and what we know is wickedness it is wicked for us to do; and conscience always rings true to this fact. That our neighbour or competitor in business can do a shabby or an admittedly wrong thing, and go home with what is called an "easy conscience," a thing which, were we to do, could send us home in misery—is no question whether he has, or has not, a conscience. It means that we are living, and he is dead. Nor will he escape on his own terms. The hour will come when that which is in the grave shall hear the voice and come forth; when his experience will repeat itself in the old words: "And in hades he lift up his eyes, being in torments." He will be judged, not by the conscience he had, but by the conscience he *might* have had.

An educated conscience does not mean an inflamed or morbid conscience; but it does mean the inward monitor put there by our Creator as guide and danger-signal in crossing the perilous way between the two eternities. Ignore it, disobey it, and it ceases to be either, and becomes our perdition. For the selfish deed, the idle word, the evil motive, the dark imagination, the reckoning may seem not to-day nor yet to-morrow, but come a day

there will when, not from what we represent ourselves to be, but from what we are, will be wrung the cry: "It is John, whom I beheaded; he is risen from the dead."

This, however, is not the last word about the matter, for as yet we have found no gospel in it. The murder of the Baptist is a part of history; and the things said about conscience are as much the burden of pagan as of Christian theology and teaching. We begin to touch gospel when we address ourselves to the question: Was Herod right in his conscience-conclusion so hastily formed? Was John, indeed, risen from the dead? We know he was not. The mighty works of which the king has heard were not wrought by John. They were the works of Him concerning whom John had said: "He that cometh after me is mightier than I." They were works of pity, of compassion, of healing, of an all-embracing love—*they were the works of the Christ*. It was no stern shade of the murdered prophet doing occult things, but the presence and power of a Saviour who was in the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be redeemed.

This is the Gospel contents of our text. Long before St. Paul wrote his great letter

to the Galatians, the wisest teachers of the race had been saying with every variation of expression, "Whatever a man soweth, *that* shall he also reap." Many of the accredited teachers of our day, outside Christianity, are saying the same thing, and they are not saying it wisely. They are talking to us about something they are pleased to call the "operation of natural law." God, they tell us, if God there is, keeps no books. He needs none. Judgment, both physical and moral, works automatically. What a man does instantly reacts upon himself; he becomes the product of his deeds. Hence the appalling fact about life is not its moral indifference, but its moral inexorableness. There is truth in this; but if it be the whole truth we need not wonder if men, looking backward on their folly and failure, should become callous about their past, and indifferent about the possibilities of either present or future. If this representation of law admit of no qualification, I cannot accept it. I must hear St. Paul's oft quoted statement: "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap"—in thought of another and equally authoritative word: "He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities." To say that

what is written is written, that what is done cannot be undone, may be true. But it is not the last word of nature, and certainly it is not the last word of grace.

To affirm, for example, that Nature cannot, and never does, forgive, is to libel Nature. She not only forgives where she can, she is ever seeking to repair the injuries we do her. I came across an illustration of what I want to urge in something I read lately. "If a man," says the writer, "has broken a limb, with surgical assistance the limb is set, bound up, and not used for a time. And Nature at once begins to re-cement the ends. Then, according to the former habits of life, does Nature work; quicker if he has been a sensible man, slower if he has been a fool—but *all in the direction of forgiveness.*" Had the man made no change, say, in his diet, taken no means after his accident, the penalty would have gone on. But the moment he stopped the act of violence against, and put himself in a state of obedience to, the operations of Nature, Nature forgave him, and, with a caution about the future, gave him back as much as she could.

I met a man some months ago whom I had not seen for ten or more years. At that time he appeared to be drinking himself into his

grave. He was bloated, gross, seemingly self-abandoned, and morally hideous. When I saw him again he was as one physically re-made. In answer to my look of astonishment which I could not conceal, he said, "I understand; when you saw me last I was what I was; now, by the grace of God, I am what I am." So is it throughout the realm and working of divine law. To say that we can never get back what we have once squandered in sin and folly is not to say that we can get nothing. The wish to get back in this sense may be as selfish as it would be immoral to gratify it. But I say something more to the purpose: we may even get something higher than we have lost, if we prepare ourselves to receive. The man to whom I have referred is speaking to-day with an authority he would never have had, but for this experience gained in the school of Satan. Few of us can risk a price like this, but all of us have some of that experience which is knowledge gained at the expense of much we wished we had not done.

If there are those of you whose conscience is troubled by nothing more serious than a few regrets which do not seriously imperil your peace of mind, what has so far been said has no special message for you. But if there

are those of us whose past is coming back as our enemy, then let us turn to Him who can only give us the forgiveness that carries with it the right to forgive ourselves. Our hope, yours and mine, our one refuge from the foes of our own making, is in repentance towards God, and faith in Him who bore our sin in His own body on the tree. Without this faith all the buried badness, the forgotten wrong, will come back to us, "a John the Baptist risen from the dead."

And, I once more repeat, that he only repents who says: Let the consequences of my wrong-doing work themselves out according to a just law. I have but one desire—to know that I am at peace with God; one heart-wrought prayer, to realise that my will is reconciled to the holy will of God. Let a man say this, and mean it, and from that moment the laws of nature, and the work of grace, begin in him their marvellous change from death unto life. "Whatever touches and ennobles us," as Dr. Martineau remarks, "in the memories and experiences of the past, is a divine birth out of sorrow, and pain, and failure."

Herod could not put back the head of the prophet, nor could action or repentance of his

erase from the page of history the record of that cruel deed. No; but repentance, and fruits meet for repentance, might in him have wrought out in blessing to multitudes. He could not undo what he had done, but he might have used what he had done as an experience. The sorrow for it might have taken the sting out of the wound, and the wound itself might have been used for the healing of his nation. In plain words, he might have sought to make some atonement for the evil he had done to one, by making his contrition a means of good to many. Let us believe that our past, however sad and broken it may have been, need be no John the Baptist risen from the dead; that it may become all at one with Christ in doing mighty works, and we have learned how to use our dead self as a stepping-stone to higher things.

I chanced to be looking some time ago into the hymn-book used a few years back by the evangelists, Moody and Sankey; and, among hymns good and healthy, I came upon one which, in my judgment, is neither. It describes the downward career of a wicked life, and when at last the sinner comes to himself and would have mercy, the so-called hymn gives back the ominous answer:—

“Too late, too late, will be the cry,
Jesus of Nazareth has passed by.”

Not so. The person who wrote that puts the finality, where finality there is, in the wrong place. Jesus of Nazareth has not, and never will, have passed by, so long as there is the shadow of a hope that any man, however lost and out of the way, will turn, look to Him, and be saved. It is the sinner himself who passes by the Crucified One, the pleading One, and filled with wicked rebellion will not so much as look. That is the fatal “too late.” “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord.”

“ ‘And whosoever cometh
I will not cast him out.’
O patient love of Jesus
Which drives away our doubt;
Which calls us very sinners,
Unworthy though we be
Of love so free and boundless,
To come, dear Lord, to Thee.”

CHRISTIANS AND THE THEATRE

“ All things ” (that are lawful) “ are lawful for me ; but all lawful things are not expedient.”

1 CORINTHIANS vi. 12.

XVIII

CHRISTIANS AND THE THEATRE

I RECEIVED a letter a few weeks ago from a youth who tells me that he is close upon twenty years of age, a first year's arts student in the Glasgow University, and with thoughts, at present, about the Christian ministry as his future work. "I am writing you for enlightenment," he says, "about a point raised in your book entitled 'Men in the Making.' Re-reading these addresses lately, a paragraph in the one on 'Self-Respect' particularly arrested my attention. The quotation is in these terms: 'For me to call myself a Christian, and yet be on terms of apparent friendship, easy good nature, and tolerance of men and things that stand for Belial, that are Belial, is one of the most effective ways I know of crucifying Christ afresh, and putting Him to open shame.'"

"My particular difficulty," writes this young

man, "is the old one of the theatre and the music-hall." He has frequently attended both, and he describes at some length, and with marked intelligence, his own impressions and experience of these places. The instances in the latter of what he calls "questionable morale" have, in his judgment, been singularly rare; while in the former—the theatre—he has often been literally provided with "food for thought," and has come away "instructed, not to say edified." So far from receiving hurt from his occasional visits to music-hall and theatre, he is quite sure he has found harmless amusement in the one and moral teaching in the other. But, at the same time, he has to admit that what passes the bar of his own conscience about this matter, is in direct conflict with the sentiment and convictions of many whom he is "bound to look up to, as examples of the highest types of Christian men and women he knows." In other words, he has an uneasy feeling that there is more in the attitude of these people to the institutions in question, than he has dreamed of as yet out of his years and experience.

Before I come closer to the issue raised in this letter, I may make one or two remarks. That attendance on this form of amusement is

amazingly on the increase cannot be denied. There is not a town of any appreciable size where it is not doing as much as any other influence to put material into the life structure of our younger people more especially. Is it, then, a creditable state of things that the Christian Church should be practically undecided as to the character and tendency of an institution that exerts in our midst a power so declarative and widespread?

And yet, I know not anything, which can be said to be permissible at all, about which it is more difficult for a thoughtful and fair-minded person to pronounce a dogmatic opinion, than it is upon the relation of the Christian to the theatre. Of all amusements it involves the most perplexing considerations for those who are anxious to walk circumspectly in the Christian life. If it is true that there is nothing good for us to have and enjoy, which Christianity does not allow, by what right, or on whose authority, do we bar as not good this dramatic genius—perhaps, as it is often said, the “highest form of genius belonging to the province of pure literature”? The craving for the kind of excitement which is produced by seeing a great play worthily staged and acted is as natural, and therefore as innocent, as any

other mental or physical sensation. Hence the alternatives before us are said to be these two: Not that dramatic representations shall cease—this is settled for us by the inextinguishable craving and demand of the human mind—but whether there shall be a theatre cleansed from all tainted associations; or, whether it shall go down hopelessly and become the recognised centre for all the more sinister elements of our towns and cities?

There is much to be said for this contention. Some of us know that the development of a great drama can excite precisely the same class of emotions that are most susceptible to the influence of a powerful sermon. It does seem hard that they who can use the theatre in this sense should be asked to forego what is to them not only a harmless, but a helpful recreation, because shallow-brained or vicious people choose to frequent places where the supply is arranged to meet the demand.

I am speaking now about the theatre; the music-hall, which my correspondent classes with the theatre, is quite another institution. The latter does not claim to instruct, or to weary us with moral lessons. It exists to amuse. Nor is there anything necessarily wrong in this. It must be judged upon other grounds.

The music-hall, in truth, is a reaction against the more serious aims and purposes of the theatre. In a conversation I had with Sir Henry Irving a few months before his death, he gave expression to his thoughts and feelings about this reaction in terms I have often regretted I did not write down at the time. The most rigid Puritan could not have improved upon them.

Let me touch for a moment, in the first place, upon the right or wrong, as I conceive of it from a Christian point of view, of theatre-going. "Whether or not I am a Christian," said a man lately, "this I know, I want to be a Christian; and to be one I would not consciously keep back any part of the price. And I can go to the theatre at stated times to see carefully selected plays, not only without hurt to what I want to be, but with very distinct help to it." Then that man, speaking for himself, and on the assumed sincerity of his testimony, has the right he claims. Whatever a man has tried, has proved, and shown himself able to use wisely in his Christian development, to that *whatever*, be it what it may, he has a right. If those who know him best, who come nearest to him in the various relationships of life, say of him, "He is a God-fearing man, he

more than professes religion, he has the religion he professes"—then such a man has the right to such legitimate pleasure as he may find from time to time in a dramatic representation. If he is persuaded that to use the theatre guardedly helps him to attack the more serious duties and problems of life refreshed in body and mind, he has the right which he allows himself.

The right, I repeat. But now, further, let me try to say, with equal clearness, that if this man *is* a Christian, so far from the assertion of his right being the conclusion of the matter, it is only the beginning of it. There are many things that it may be right for us to do; but if we are disciples of Christ we have to ask ourselves, How will the right work out for others? We know the feeling, and sometimes the revolt, against this limitation. "Why should our external life be marked out for us by ignorant people and senseless conventions? If we have a right we must have liberty to use it, or it is idle to speak of it as a right." By all means, but, when said, the value as well as the test of liberty is in the use of it. No man was more jealous about his personal liberty, or more ready to assert it, than the Apostle Paul. But this done, he was

even more ready to subject his liberty to a higher law.

We say that we can use the Theatre without hurt to ourselves; but can we speak with quite the same confidence about its influence on others? Am I indulging in exaggeration if I suggest that for one play of what is called an "elevating character," which makes its way on the stage, there are a score that are negatively worthless or positively vicious? In answer to this it may be urged that if the Christians would support the theatre, instead of shunning it in prejudice or panic, they would get the plays they can approve. I would not say an ungenerous word about any attempt to "raise the drama," as in the notable instance of the "Repertory Theatre." As an attempt, however, it is only possible where you have a large population; and there you have a bewildering diversity of opinion as to what is "elevated drama." If we take the average theatre in Glasgow, we shall probably find that its higher priced seats, and at some very questionable plays, are occupied by nominal Christians. Does it mean that the taste of these Christians requires attention? If so, the theatre will not succeed where the Church has failed.

Then what about those who cater for our

lighter hours? I should, I hope, be the last to encourage a suspicion about the private life of those who live by the stage. But the perils of this profession are admittedly serious, especially for women and girls. Should we honour, asks one, with such warmth of admiration, those who do not fall, if experience had not proved how hard it is to stand? Any amusement which involves such moral risks on the part of those who provide it, should temper our confidence in the use of a right which seems always to excite the uneasy question whether it is a right we ought to use. Let us admit that much which the apologists for the theatre have to urge is fair and reasonable. Only, when liberal allowance is made on this side, the fact remains that there is much ground for the distrust which, in evangelical circles, this institution is, and always has been, regarded. I refuse to admit that it is any part of my business, as a Christian man, to enter on the doubtful experiment of trying to lift the theatre. I have, or ought to have, more important and characteristic work to do.

This, then, is my conception of what ought to be my relation to the theatre; as a Christian and within carefully prescribed limits, I have the right to use it; but as a Christian I think

it better not to exercise that right. In a letter to the Corinthians, writing to the converts from heathenism, St. Paul says: "If any of them that believe not invite you to one of their feasts, and ye be disposed to go; then go, but do not go half condemning yourselves in that which you allow." We notice as Bushnell points out, that in this permission the Apostle drops, as it were, this subjunctive clause—"and ye be disposed to go." As if he were saying to himself inwardly and sadly: "I trust that not many of you will be so disposed; for the love of Christ in the grand liberty of service and discipleship ought to be a liberty too full and positive to leave any desire to avail yourselves of this permission."

This is my attitude to things which, however lawful in themselves, may not be expedient for me. I speak for myself when I repeat a remark I have just made: As a Christian I have something better to do than to assert my right to use an institution which, I am convinced, is not a friend to the truths and service to which I have dedicated such powers as I possess in the short life I have to live. If, in answer to this, any should say, "We think you are mistaken. We are equally convinced

that the drama may be made a hand-maiden of religion to us and to others, as much as anything else," I answer: "Follow your convictions. I am not your conscience in this matter. But, at the same time, of this I am sure, history and experience are against you." The craving for the fare provided in theatre and music-hall may in some sense be a natural craving; but it grows by what it feeds on, and it has become one of the gravest perils of our times. It is for excitement and amusement. And these by all means—only the danger is, not that people, and especially our young people, will have amusement and excitement, but that they will have nothing else. In a day when theatres are filling and our places of worship are emptying, it is high time some stern reaction set in against this apotheosis of amusements which is at the expense of everything that is serious in our modern world.

When I see what this world is, and think of what God wants it to be, then if God means anything to me, I have no leisure to expend on pursuits which, however lawful they may be in themselves, are not expedient for me. Let us become better Christians. Let us realise that we have a baptism to be

baptized with in the cultivation of the higher life, and in its influence upon others; and just as we are straightened till it be accomplished, will the question of the theatre, like many others over which we are doubtful and divided, settle itself. It will leave us free to have all lawful things, and it will make us too free to desire those about the expediency of which there lurks a doubt. The whole secret is there: let us become better Christians. Let the love of Christ constrain us; the love that has in it the "expulsive power of a new affection," and the dynamic of sacrifice. Then, with Augustine, would I say, "Do as you like," for I know what it is we shall like to do.

THE ROCK OF THE CHURCH

“And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter,
and upon this rock I will build My church. . . . I
will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven.”

ST. MATTHEW xvi. 18, 19.

XIX

THE ROCK OF THE CHURCH

THE passage as a whole from which these words are taken has been a battle-field for centuries between two irreconcilable conceptions of Christianity. Our Lord had put a question to His disciples, and it was no mere casual enquiry suggested by some chance turn in the conversation. It was really an investigation into the foundation of that world-wide kingdom He had come to establish.

Peter had answered the question, and Christ had answered Peter, "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven. And I say unto thee, that thou art Peter"—*Petros*, part of the rock—"and upon thee"—*Petra*, the rock itself—"I will build My church." It is well to mark the verbal carefulness in the use of these two words.

For, as has often been pointed out, this is one of the places where we must distinguish between the "quality as expressed by the individual, and the individual who expresses the quality." Had the promise been a personal one to Peter, surely the personal name of Peter would have been repeated: "Thou art Peter, and upon *thee*, Peter, I will build my church." But our Lord does not say this. Hence I agree with those who see in this change of word clear evidence of an intention to draw off attention from the individual to *something* in the individual—to a quality.

What was, or what is, this something which I speak of as a quality? To find an answer we must turn to the opening of the incident of which our text is the close. The Son of Man had come to the place in His ministry to the world where, to go further, He must know more. We sometimes hear it said of a man, "It isn't in him." And where this is true there is nothing more to be said; art nor science can put in what nature has left out. Christ, I repeat, had come to the place where He had to ask Himself: "Is there in man what I am come to get out of man? Is there basis in him, anything solid on which I can build; or is he, as a moral nature,

after all, but shifting sand and treacherous morass?"

This, as I read it, is the meaning of the question, "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?" And we may be thankful that at this critical place in their relationship the disciples were faithful with the Master: "Some say Thou art John the Baptist; others say, Thou art one of the prophets." They told Him the current report as they knew it, and to Jesus it was heart-breaking. If this were all the impression He had made, the Son of man had become man in vain, for in man there was nothing to which he could appeal. Must it not, therefore, have been with a very agony of anxiety that He turned to the men who, by this time, ought to know better, as He confronted them with what was virtually a challenge: "But whom say ye that I am"? We know the answer; and it was enough. Christ had touched rock, and the foundation of His Kingdom in human hearts was assured. That in Peter which responded to Deity in Christ was itself divine. Flesh and blood had not put it there; flesh and blood could not cast it out: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Christ hails the answer with a glad "Eureka"

—“Thou art Petros, part of the everlasting Petra upon which I build My church.” “In that in thee which is one with Me, I have the sure guarantee of measureless possibilities.”

If this interpretation of the part of the incident under consideration is so far reliable, we have what should be a final word on a matter of vital moment. As it has been well put, we are taught to measure the world's possibilities by our “Saviour's estimate of them, and not by the sum, as yet, of its actualities.”* Enough for us to know that He has gauged the capacities of human nature and life—and found rock. Let us think, until the significance of this begins to grow upon us. If we believe that men can be saved we shall believe that it is worth our while to spend and be spent in trying to save them. Without this faith we shall hope for nothing, with it we shall despair of nothing. It is saving belief because it is more than touched with emotion, it has in it the dynamic which does for us these three things: It lifts us

* It must now be more than twenty years ago, that the main part of this exegesis was suggested to me by Rev. John Thomas, M.A., of Liverpool. I have met nothing during these years which has shaken my faith in its soundness.

above the fear of our enemies; it shows us how to recognise friends; and, in God, it forbids us to set limits to our own powers.

And when I say that this faith lifts us above the fear of our enemies, I use the term in the sense of our difficulties. We have our difficulties, and the nearer we approach them on one side, the more formidable they appear. We may, as many do, close our eyes to them or, as we imagine, have our eyes so open as to see nothing else. As touching our more characteristic difficulties, it is possible under a great show of concern to canvass them in the terms of a fore-ordination which seems to doom all our efforts called "religious" to a foregone conclusion of failure. Surely this is a blunder. A discouraged man is already a half-beaten man; so is it with a discouraged church. That our day and work demand every bit of grace, grit, and resource there is in us, I should be the first to admit and to assert.

For myself, I am persuaded that the real difficulty which fronts an earnest man to-day is the fast waning sense of what is evil, and what is its incarnation in sin. Nor do I speak of sin in any technical sense. I just mean by it that something within and without us which touches everything, and which, unless it is overcome,

destroys everything it touches. With this waning sense of sin we have a growing absorption in selfish-getting. And this connotes one principal thing. Whether it is a cause or consequence of this passing of the fear of God, we need not debate. If we are true teachers, authentic priests, the truth for us is serious enough, that a materialism which is declared to be dead in theory was never more alive in practice. Not, at any rate, since the most decadent days of pagan Rome has wealth, interpreted by money, been worshipped as it is to-day for what it enables men, and their women, to do on the least worthy sides of existence.

But, on the other side, what is it the restless hungry heart of the modern world is crying after through voices that best interpret its longing? What but the bringing in of new and better human conditions? What but a State marked by righteousness where men shall dwell together as comrades in helpful fellowship, serving each the need of all, so that wrong, and want, and wretchedness shall be banished from the earth, and a greater age shall dawn of justice, peace, plenty, and contentment. The forces of our day are driving us on to a conception of Christ's salvation big enough to embrace and harmonise these two, and hitherto, rival conceptions of it:

the personal religious salvation of the soul from sin, and the ethical and social salvation of the community from wrong and suffering.

This, I am persuaded, is to be one of the achievements of the wider teaching and awakened social instinct of our times. It is work crowded with difficulties. But what of that? If we are not here to overcome difficulties, what apology have we for being here at all? The Church in the past has lived by her difficulties. Her greatest epochs have been made out of apparent impossibilities—"As dying, and behold she has lived." And her life has wrought through the faith of her remnant. The world is not saved in crowds, nor through crowds are we saved. We recall the saying of Ibsen's that "minorities make the world." Let the Church become the creative minority, the conscience of Society, the mind of God upon the State, and the Church will make her own clearing-room; not by casting out, but by becoming an atmosphere which apathy and indifference cannot breathe. Had we but half of the present membership of our Churches, and that half were in some true sense the body of Christ's spirit, we should surely and speedily tell upon Society, and penetrate Christendom more profoundly with Christian thought and influence.

If, then, the forces of our day are driving us back upon God, that we may be re-equipped for another and greater departure towards a new and diviner order of society—has God Himself ever made a day like it? A day so mighty in its opportunity, so great in its challenge to the best there is in every brave man, in every gracious woman? What, then, of our difficulties? If there is nothing impossible with God that is God-like, in God there is nothing impossible to us. The Church has overcome in the past, she will overcome to-day as from the immortal soul of her she can say: “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Christ has gauged the capacity of human nature and life, and found rock. That rock is the divine in us; and just as we are born again into its possibilities do we realise our resources. We are shown that we have friends in many whom hitherto we have not even regarded as acquaintances.

We recall how Elisha prayed for his servant and said: “Lord open his eyes that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man and he saw, and behold the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.” Lord open our eyes that we may see. For there is an impression in the world, and it is wide and

deep, that we, as Churches, are not in sympathy with the movements outside us that are seeking to establish some truer harmony between the inner dignity and the outer lot of the vast masses of men and women. It is usual to tell us that the new movements among the masses, which are fast sweeping within their orbit the tremendous forces of labour in the Western world, are not so much religious as social. Well, if they are social they are human—and what was it that heartened our Lord when He came into the coasts of Cæsarea Philippi if not the truth that to go deep enough into the human is to find the divine? We must not forget, says one, that it is a “prodigiously vast and many-sided enterprise which drew the Word of God into flesh. Just as His Kingdom grows and widens through the centuries, Christ draws into His service innumerable side-rills of influence which go to make the central scheme of redemption.”* There are endless forces of knowledge, and culture, and law, and human genius ready for our use the moment our eyes are open to see them. Let it be manifest that the Churches are what the Church was created to be—the organised expression of the Saviour’s life, and all that is vital in these forces will,

* Dr. Oswald Dykes.

sooner or later, move into line with the more life and the fuller. "And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and behold the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire—*round about Elisha.*"

Christ has gauged the capacity of human life and has found the divine. Let the divine in us grow, and it will stretch out these present limits to fit the new consciousness of power.

For why is it that, turn where we will, we bruise ourselves against the sharp edges of a limit? Why is our attitude a kind of chronic "by your leave" to any Satan's agency that chooses to question our right of way? We who have the promise of the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven: wanting is what? If we are a Christian Church, we are the only people in the world organised for the affirmation of the truth that if ever the world is to be loosened from the lower by being bound to the higher, we must do more than try to reform it, we must be workers together with Christ to redeem it. We boast of our achievements in many directions, and our boast is justified. In physical science, for example, our triumphs so crowd each other as to be bewildering one day, and commonplace the next. And yet, there is not one of them

which does not take back with one hand much that it has given with the other.*

So is it in higher things. The reform which is sought, however earnestly, has an end in itself, but needs time to develop strange and, indeed, tragic resources of defeat and disappointment. If it have not its roots in the gospel of Christian redemption, it is but part of the old, weary story of civilisations emerging from barbarism to fall into barbarism again, with no lasting good to the race. And if this be the best we can do for the world, then let us put our shoulders into it; only I, for one, am not young enough to get enthusiastic over the probable result. So long as we leave unclosed the awful cleft which separates between the will of man and the holy will of God, all our attempts at human betterment are but as the white-washing of sepulchres.

There is profound reason underlying the statement, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of heaven." To be born again is to live; all else is death in one form or another. To be born again is to find a new hope for the world, a new joy in its tasks, a higher meaning in its evolution, a sense of the immortal in its service, and a working faith that God will commend it to Himself, and to us,

* *Vide* Selected Note, p. 233.

before He has done with it. But if, in the name of the Church, we are content to fall into the current of social religion, with or without the spiritual change, it will be to repeat history on its hopeless side. We may accept without reserve or suspicion the help of forces to which I have alluded, in the effort to unloose the world from the bonds of sin and death. But if we are the Church, we, and we only, have the keys. These forces may be used as means to an end, and that end must be more than reformation. Unless we experience the fundamental change we call regeneration, these forces will be but as the blind play of shadows on the sombre curtain of eternity.

In the former part of this passage from which our text is taken, the "personality of the apostle is resolved into its representative quality"; in the latter, the personality of the same apostle is specialised: "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven."

The same promise, or power, was conferred later, and in almost exactly the same terms, upon the company of believers spoken of as the Ecclesia. And the power of the keys is more than a mystical phrase, it is a living reality when its authority over others is that which is given by virtue of Christlike character. It has

nothing to do with priest-craft; it has everything to do with priest-hood. For it is a power that leaves it no peradventure whether men will be influenced by it. "All men," says the Koran, "are commanded by the saint." All men know, if only by instinct, that this priesthood of goodness has been won at the cross, in blood, the "crimson of which gives a living hue to all form, all history, all life." Let us no longer lose our purchase of this mighty term, through fear of its sacerdotal connotations. Dissociated from the institution, as it has been well pointed out, the true priest makes good his claims to mediatorship in the heart of his fellows, solely by the possession of those spiritual qualities which create and confirm the impression that he is nearer to God than they.

We are told that, throughout the strain of the civil war in America, Abraham Lincoln found a true priest in the godly and much-suffering woman who had charge of his children. He who became more powerful than any monarch of modern times through the reverence of his countrymen for the man he was, tells us how he was sustained in that awful crisis of national calamity and personal sorrow by the prayers in his behalf of this stricken, yet believing woman. She knew God, Lincoln felt, so she became God's

priest to Lincoln. He resorted to her for intercession on his behalf—he who would, as one truly remarks, have treated with “courteous and civil incredulity a proffer of sacerdotal good offices from Cardinal Gibbons.”

Do we know God so that people feel it, and make us God’s priests to them? Have we no hint of the true answer in the old rebuke: “What do ye more than others?” If we say we have passed from death unto life through the new birth in the Great High Priest—how do we explain ourselves? Why are we so straightened in grace and growth? Why are we so grievously the creatures of self-made limits? Wanting, I ask again, is what? We have but to put our possibilities upon the altar to find ourselves on the right side of Pentecost; and to be there is to command the keys. No gates of Hades shall prevail against men who, filled with the fullness of God, can take up the words with the old ring of triumph: “If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not His own Son but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?”

SELECTED NOTE.

Dr. Tudor Jones in an admirable synopsis of Rudolf Eucken's great book, "The Truth of Religion," points out that in the first part of this work Eucken deals with what he calls a "great crisis in religion." Many factors, we are told, have operated in the bringing about of this crisis. On the one hand, the nineteenth century has witnessed the increase and development of material things in a way quite unknown before. Man is immersed in a sea of work. He has gained immeasurably through the enormous addition to his scientific and general knowledge. But, declares Eucken, the loss has been greater than the gain. The old inwardness and peace of the soul have largely passed away, and the very work which promised to bring so many blessings to man now threatens to destroy everything that to him is of value. We have become mere tools of a mechanism which we ourselves have created. And unless we return to something deeper than the material work of the day has brought forth, we shall find that even the evanescent value of material work will be lost. Something *above* the world must become ours if we are to be saved from being destroyed by the world. Here is once more the need of religion. Everything is at stake as to whether we find this Something or not ; it is a matter of life or death.

CAN WE ESCAPE A FUTURE LIFE?

“The memory of the just is blessed.”

PROVERBS x. 7.

“Yea, saith the Spirit, for their works do follow them.”

REVELATION xiv. 13.

“We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.”

2 CORINTHIANS v. 10.

XX

CAN WE ESCAPE A FUTURE LIFE?

THE memory of the just, we are told, is blessed. "The memory." This reminds us of the universal fact. A little longer, or a little shorter the time, and that is all we shall be to the world—a memory, even if we are that. For to us in succession, all things die. The past contains all that time has rendered dear and familiar, and it flits silently away. The future wraps up in its folds whatever is cold, strange, and unknown, while yet its mysteries come swiftly upon us.

And death is not poetical. It is the blunt change from the side about which we know a little, to another of which we know next to nothing. Yet, in the retrospect, sombre and cheerless as it often is, there is a partial view of it which may contain more than half the sadness. Just as we are lifted to a higher stand-

point by a spiritual philosophy which is never enunciated in words, only in experience, do we realise that human life and its surroundings are not such a collection of perishable things after all.

Associated with the fact that we all must die are two things, and they are real! We may die regretted, and we may be worth repeating. The first part of this certainty is soon told, but it is worth telling. There are people whom we have known for a lifetime, whose death excites scarcely a thought, unless it be that the event suggests the question, have they ever lived? "Such a man is dead," some one said to Emerson, and the sage quietly made answer, "I have known that these twenty years." There are others again whose death in life has had a very different manifestation. I have often been called upon to inter men over whom, on the human side of this function, I have neither felt nor simulated the least regret. They had been a hardship in the home, a disturbing influence in the Church, and, in the general world, unfriendly friends. I have looked into the faces of the mourners, so called, and my heart has found its pity. For, as a great novelist truly remarks, hard faces never seem so hard as at a

funeral. May it never be that hard faces look down upon our grave, yours and mine.

We may die regretted, and we may be worth repeating. The latter part of this statement, again, is soon said, but it is to say much. Because when we put it to ourselves thoughtfully—how many people have we known who have passed away, whom we do wish to meet again? We missed them for a while, and some more than others, but in how many cases does lapse of time make it true that out of sight is out of mind? I have to confess that I scarcely know any question which has in it more elements of perplexity and sadness. But I am very thankful for the other side of this reflection, for the precious memories I cherish of a few men and women who have ascended to the starry places, leaving me with a longing unspeakable to have again—

“The touch of a vanished hand,
And the sound of a voice that is still.”

It is out of this better experience there comes the only craving which, in my judgment, can keep the belief in a personal immortality in our human affections. Good men are being restored and repeated age after age. The true riches, after all, to which you and I are heirs, are the fruits of them that sleep.

I read lately in a historical essay some sentences which, interpreted by their spirit, contain a suggestive truth: "American Freedom," says the writer, "was not possible but for the determination and strength of the Puritan character. The Puritan was not possible but for Luther, and Luther was not possible but for Paul." If this is so, and I imagine it would be hard to disprove it, can it be said that what we call death was a finality to Luther or to Paul? When the earth took the atoms of these men, did the earth take their whole being? Nothing is truer than to say that the earth did nothing of the kind. Their better parts, those elements of their soul which were pure and noble, were preserved, and will be so long as the race lasts. Is he, then, through whom is revealed to us immortal thoughts, himself only mortal?

Death, says a great authority in science, is no mere dissolution into all existence. "Copernicus still lives in Kepler, and Kepler in Newton; and to-day Copernicus lives in every one of us who has freed himself intelligently from the error of a geocentric conception of the world." The truths these men brought to light are immortal; and like the "torch in the mysteries of Eleusis, that passed from hand to hand," their soul-life will be handed down faithfully

from generation to generation. The progress of humanity is but an accumulation of the most precious treasures we possess. It is the imperishable increment of human souls: "The memory of the just is blessed; yea, saith the Spirit, for their works do follow them."

No one, I repeat, will deny that the influence of a man's life will live on when his body falls. We speak of men being immortal quite apart from what we may believe about a conscious personal future beyond the life that now is. Is this enough? And when I ask is it enough, far be it from me even to hint that it is not much. Men have lived noble lives without having, in the sense of a belief in a future life, a "hope to cheer the tomb." It was once my privilege to talk with a man who was near his end—a man who had lived a life of faith in great causes, and sacrificed himself for them with rare courage and unflinching consistency. "Have you any hope beyond?" I asked him. "I am not conscious of any," he answered; and after a pause he added: "I am content; what little I have done worthy the doing will help on the common good."

This man's life in the present, as he knew, had been better than his creed about a future he did not know. And, future life or no future

life, it is better to deserve what we do not receive, than to receive what we do not deserve. But if I ask again—"Is this enough?" I shall not assume that I have met the question by saying—"not if the Power that make us be sane." "It is the cry of the soul," we are told, "Lord, let me live again." Which means that the accumulated experience of life ought to have a sphere in which it can better develop and prove itself. "I thank God," says a well-known preacher, "that the belief in a future life is in the world, and that it is in the profoundest interest of every man to keep it there."

If I venture to offer a word of comment on this order of statement, it shall be comment and not criticism. It is true that the belief in a future life is in the world; and with all that is in me do I maintain that it is in the interests of every man to keep it there. But how many of us are vitally alive to this interest? I am forced to think that those of us who are saying, "Lord, let me live again," are the remnant, and it is not increasing. We are living in a day which is fundamentally indifferent about the things which it is most in our interest to keep in the world. A day that is losing all fear of God will not be concerned to keep its faith in a future life; for a belief in this future is all at one with a belief in God.

This now is our position : We have to tell men that it is not a matter of what they believe about a future ; it is a question of what is ; and if they will not accept what is, in love, they must take it out in wrath. I have a further word to say about this position. In passing I would point to the strange moral paradox that while evidence for the truth of a future life is increasing, indifference about it is becoming more apparent. The changed attitude of science to this problem may be at once a help and a danger. It would seem to be a perilous thing to take a question out of the realm of faith, and unload it upon us as a fact. While, again, it is a remarkable circumstance that science is finding a fascination over this question, that is all but entirely absent from dogmatic theology.

Investigation has advanced since the day Dr. Johnson is reported to have said, "I would fain have more evidence of man's immortality." Much later than Johnson's day it was held to be the scientific attitude to brush aside all speculation about a future life as among the things unknowable. I can well remember the time when Tyndal and Huxley were the luminaries in this particular sky ; and, for them, there was little above it which concerned us mortals who were below it.

But all this has changed, or, if not all, yet enough to make the change one of simply enormous significance. We have now men of first rank in the world of Science—and they are ever adding to their number—who, with a markedly earnest purpose, are giving themselves to what is known as “Psychical Research.” In other words, they are engaged in a severe investigation of the various phenomena which have an undoubted bearing on the great problem they have set themselves to solve. Nothing is taken for granted which the mathematician must not take for granted in his own department. It is sheer, honest truth-seeking by men who approach their rare and critical work with an equipment not easily matched in any other like number of human minds. And this is being done because these men, many of whom are by no means biassed in favour of Christianity, are convinced that there is rational basis for the conclusion set forth in Frederic W. H. Myers’ great work, “Human Personality: and its Survival of Bodily Death.”

And before I say what the conclusion is, permit me a word about this man. Myers was a wide and accurate scholar, with brilliant gifts, and a poet of no mean order. After leaving the University he travelled for some

years, and during this time he was, as he thought, "converted" in the Christian sense and to Christianity. But eventually the vision faded under the first flush of the then triumphant Darwinism. His friends, W. H. Clifford, Frederic Harrison, and George Eliot, before all others, were of this faith. Largely by their influence Myers embraced it, but he could not be held by it. As one says, "An inspiration, mystical, poetic, a wind, a voice of the spirit, blowing, whispering—he knew not whence—summoned him away, and spake of a new creed." Then came the "final faith," as he calls it, which he sets forth in these terms: "I believe we live after earthly death. I hold that all things thought and felt, as well as all things done, are somehow photographed imperishably upon the universe, and that my whole past will probably be open to those with whom I have to do."

This belief, that we "live after earthly death," is now held, I say again, by men eminent in the scientific world. And it is centring them on an investigation that will not end in nothing. We may be within measurable distance of a day when what is called pure science will affirm this great position of faith.

There is one phase of this investigation,

known as "spiritism" or "spiritualism," which I may be expected to touch in this connection. About this I have only to say that while I believe, to use the convenient term, there is "something" in spiritism, I shall make no attempt to verify my belief. It is not a spirit I desire to see; it is the spiritual vision I crave. It is only the revelation to our own soul of the beauty of holiness which can set our hearts unalterably on God, and all that lives with Him and in Him. Only by thus seeing Him and knowing Him can we learn to love Him, and only by loving Him can we have the Spiritual vision. This, I take it, is what is meant where the parable represents our Lord as saying, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead."

For myself I believe in a conscious, personal future past death, because I believe God. Jesus, Who came to manifest God, says, "Because I live, ye shall live also." And when at times reason would try conclusion with my faith, I am helped by an illustration I once met in an admirable contribution to the subject before us by Dr. M. J. Savage. I will try to recall it, with just a bit of local colour. If I stand on the bank of the

Clyde some foggy day, when the mist is so thick that I can see but a few yards in front of me; and if I find at my feet an abutment which sustains an arch that reaches out until it is lost to sight; even though I know nothing about the construction of a bridge, I should hardly need to be told that my vision was not the measure of it. I should know that it must reach over and rest securely in a like abutment on the other side. So when I see the unfinished arch of justice and righteousness, springing out here at my feet, and reaching out into the mist, unfinished, incomplete, my reason demands I should believe that it is somewhere complete. My sense of the eternally just—which I have not put in myself—tells me that the wrongs of the ages must be righted; that justice must not owe a debt it can never pay.

Here, then, we stand. Human science, so far from being our enemy in this great quest, is now our ally. As never before does this age-long, world-wide belief in a future life hold the field. It is a rational belief, and a belief that should inspire every good man, and fill him with splendid courage.

But what of those whose attitude is one of what I have called indifference to this belief, and to that which is behind it? The answer

must no longer be the wooing note of "Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die?" Whether we turn or not makes no difference to the fact that we have not done with this life when we have done with this body. It simply means that we pass into another sphere to meet the account of the "things done in the body, whether they be good, or whether they be evil." It means that we must exist until the last black drop of rebellion against our higher life is wrung out; although it take, what for convenience of expression, we call an eternity to do it.

We have evidence in many directions of a revival of the old belief in re-incarnation and the transmigration of souls. It includes, among other things, the idea that the soul, to expiate the evil once done in a given incarnation, must pass through body after body, place after place, age after age, through incredible travail and pain toward the Nirvana, which may mean extinction or final deliverance. This probably explains the question put by the disciples to Christ concerning the blind man: "Who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" It is doctrine of sheer horror, but it is the hint of a great truth.

Theosophy is so far at one with the teaching

of Christianity, that the principle of life once received is something we can never escape; and that the use of it means the more life and the fuller, or the undying death of shame and woe. The same thing can take place in this world. I know a man to-day who as a lad and youth had exceptional advantages. He had enough head, had he used it, to make a decent appearance; but he simply loafed through school and college. When he was about twenty-two years of age his father failed in business, and soon after died. In four or five years this young man, after repeated failures in positions requiring some education, found himself little more than a common workman in the mill his father had once owned. "When I allow myself to think about what I am," he once said to me, "and what I might have been, I could fire a bullet through my worthless brain."

He had found the prepared place—in the place he had himself prepared—and to him it was hell. Thus will our next world be what we have made ourselves here. As we close our eyes in time, so shall we open them in eternity—with this difference: the shams, the shufflings, the disguises and self-deceits possible to this mortal state will be all torn away, and the naked

spirit will be face to face with a judgment that will be so inexpressibly awful, because it knows the finding to be so inexpressibly just.

It is no question of "to be or not to be," as we choose. Be we must—and what? We cannot escape the future. But we can prepare ourselves for it, and this preparation is not a matter for the end, but all the way. "I pray you in Christ's stead," pleads the Apostle, "be ye reconciled to God." And to be reconciled to God is to be at peace with ourselves; it is to be reconciled to Life as distinguished from death in all its manifold forms. "Ye will not come to Me that ye might have life," were the saddest words Jesus ever said, for they mean the saddest thing in our human world. It is the quarrel with life. Everything turns upon life, and until we realise this, all our thinking about religion is in a circle. And what is life? What is God? And the Bible answers, "God is love." We live as we love what God loves; for nothing is "worthy to be called life which cannot be affirmed of God." Can our own soul, or can they who come closest to us testify to the truth of our word when we say: "I live, yet not I, but Christ that liveth in me"—then we are reconciled to God, to the divine

in us, to ourselves. And once we have this peace, what is there most worth doing we cannot do? Those who work with the mind know the fear and shrinking with which a new and difficult task is first approached, and the sudden light that breaks upon it when the act or attention is well sustained. This light remits none of the cost of turning the intention into achievement; but it makes all the difference between working with, or without, hope and inspiration. And so, while life gives us no discharge from the warfare we must wage in living for the immortal amid the mortal, it does swallow up the pain of the self-sacrifice we make, and converts the hardest toil into springs of purest joy.

Is it not, then, high time to awake out of this modern sleep of indifference, and with a quickened sense of its unthinkable importance, come into inquest with this truth of a future life? Live we must, die we cannot, except in the sense of the undying death of remorse and shame. Would we know how God regards this fact, turn we our thoughts to Calvary. Let us look, and think, and pray, until the mind quickens, and our heart begins to throb and glow with the meaning of that Cross rooted in our human world. It is love—love

so unspeakable and so undeserved, Our Father wants us to live, and to win us to life He has done all that even God could do, and yet leave us responsible beings.

But it all comes back to the same truth on the human side. If we will not accept this gift of eternal life, we must lay hold upon death; and omnipotence cannot come between our choice and its consequences. And it means everything, not only how we decide, but whether we decide at once. There is that to be done in this life which cannot be done in any other. This note of urgency, of entreaty, of warning, sounds through the Word of God like the solemn tolling of a great bell: "To-day, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts." Speaking of the two malefactors crucified with the Christ, some writer has said: "One was saved that none might despair, and only one that none might presume." May we not be of them who presume. The life beyond the grave is a reality; let us beware how we enter upon it.

* * * * *

The foregoing address is not included in this collection because I imagine it to have any special value as a contribution to the subject

with which it is an attempt to deal. I am conscious of no such conceit. I shall be content if word of mine do anything to force upon our attention this one question: What has become of the note of urgency and warning in modern preaching? References, almost to wearisomeness, will be found in these addresses to an indifference I speak of advisedly, as fundamental, about the real concerns of the present, not to speak of these concerns as vital to the future. Truth need fear no foe but that of indifference; and if it be not the first and nearest work of our day to stake our all in an attack upon this indifference, I, for my part, do not know what our work is.

In our reaction from the sterner teaching of a former day, with its cruder representations of heaven and hell, we have now had for nearly a half century a preaching of the love of God which has been accompanied, step by step, with a waning fear of God. It may be fairly questioned whether this waning fear is, in any sense, a result of the preaching in question. But few, I imagine, will deny the terrible fact itself; and it is a result of something. How far is our preaching responsible for this something? Have we not, with the best intentions and the highest

motives, been preaching a love of God with the active and protective side of love left out—what the Scriptures speak of as wrath? In the measure we love, we hate whatever is the enemy of the person or principle we love. We may shrink from the thought of wrath in God, because we associate it with arbitrary penalty attached to actions, rather than as being, as it is, the consequences growing out of our actions. There is a sense in which it is true to say that God never punishes the sinner; it is the sinner who in his sin punishes himself. The wrath of God is that which is inevitable to insurrection against life; it is death here and hereafter.

Dare we, then, whose awful responsibility it is to stand between the quick and the dead, keep out of the forefront of our message this vital truth that our use of to-day is our make of to-morrow? Nay, in love's name, tell it out with every boom of emphasis, with every whisper of pleading: "He that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." This will also put a much needed caution in our utterances, especially when dealing in certain atmospheres with the social questions of our day. In

giving due importance to the present, we shall be in less danger of leaving the impression that we regard the future as of comparatively little importance.

I listened some time ago to an address delivered at a "Pleasant Sunday Afternoon" meeting for men. The speaker, who has a recognised position in the political world, quoted, with evident approval, the answer said to have been made by Thoreau, when dying, to some one who asked him the question: "Henry, you are so near the border now, can you see anything on the other side." And Thoreau made reply, "One world at a time, my friend." Toward the close of his effort, the speaker who told this story said some sensible words to the younger men before him about the importance of using wisely their present opportunities, in thought of what the future would require of them. But why, on his theory of one world at a time, should he have troubled these young men about their future? Why not have said to them, "Enjoy yourselves while you may, according to your bent, and let the future, when it comes, look after itself?" The truth is that talk in this strain about one world at a time is dangerous nonsense. Nothing is unrelated; and we can

no more divide our life than we can divide the two worlds. It may sound very practical, and give to our speech the approved liberal flavour to say, "Take care of the present and the future will take care of itself." So it will; and it will take very good care to be the future which is made by the present. "The children of this world," as Christ describes them, never mistake the meaning of the present in its relation to the future of the world for which they live. And unless our belief in a life beyond the grave has resolved itself into an affair of words, why should we neglect this potent weapon in our warfare against the sin and moral indifference of our day?

When I was a minister in Yorkshire, it was my privilege to have as my guest for a week the late George Jacob Holyoake. In one of our conversations I told him about hearing when I was a lad his lecture on "The Logic of Death." "Ah," he answered, "so you heard that thing; well, I could not repeat it now." And continuing, he said, "I must have a conscious, personal future to keep the balance of the moral universe true. They are as the stars of the sky in multitude who never get a fair chance; and if righteousness is the

heart of things we must all, good and bad, come to our own. Preach to men," he said to me earnestly, "that as we sow we must reap, and that the reaping is not confined to the life, which, in St. Paul's phrase, 'we now live in the flesh.'"

THE PULPIT AND THE PRESS

Extracts from a paper read before the Institute of Journalists (Glasgow and West of Scotland districts), Autumn Meetings.

XXI

THE PULPIT AND THE PRESS

WHEN your President,* with, as I am informed, your indulgence, asked me to vary your proceedings on this occasion with a half-hour to forty minutes' talk or paper, I agreed to do so. This decision was not taken without thought, nor, indeed, without considerable trepidation. But as the man in the parable was condemned, not so much for the misuse as the non-use of his one talent, so I would even dare to misuse, if I cannot better use your time, while I attempt to say a few things about the well-worn theme of the Pulpit and the Press. In doing this I ought, I suppose, to confront you as the representatives of the power which is shortly to finish the work it is said to have all but done—that of superseding the pulpit.

* A. S. Charteris, Esq.

Had I no other form of nervousness, gentlemen, in venturing to address you to-night than fear on that score, I should be less conscious than I am of the temerity of my undertaking. So far as I am concerned, you, or any other institution, may capture the pulpit out of existence without further delay. My complaint against you, or against those who claim to speak in your name, is that having threatened the pulpit so often it lives so long. Daniel Webster is reported to have said that a very formidable argument for the truth of essential Christianity was the fact that for the long centuries it had survived the pulpit. And by "pulpit" I imagine him to have meant the appanage of a profession. In this sense there is no more necessary connection between the preacher's message and the pulpit, than there is between a newspaper article on Tariff Reform and the economic convictions of the man who wrote it. It is not the altar that makes the priest, but the priest who makes the altar; so it is not the pulpit that makes the preacher, but the preacher the pulpit—and when thus made it is a permanent institution.

Since I could think at all, my reason appears to have shut me up to the notion that an effect must have had a cause. And unless I

am to conclude that the realest cravings of the human heart and the profoundest speculations of the human brain are something that has gradually evolved out of nothing, I am further shut up to the belief that the something called an effect can only be explained by the something called a cause. This race of ours is a fact. Not the youngest man in this company will dispute that. What then? Well, on any conceivable theory of the universe, the race of which you and I form a part stands to it as stands the newspaper to the forme or type; the coin or medal to the die. Whatever there is in the newspaper, or engraved on coin or medal, indicates a reality in the type or the die.

We are for the most part ready to admit, and even to affirm, the endless folly of the age in which we live. But we draw the line at one place of all places. When we come to the things which the term "religion" is popularly held to connote, we get our heads on one side like so many luminous owls, and tell ourselves how enlightened we have become; what inroads we have made upon the faiths of our fathers. We are living nowhere now, if not in an age of reason. Well, I, in my day, have heard what was widely accepted for

reason doom to death many things that are living yet, and will live as long as the human heart is what it is. In other words—to paraphrase a few sentences from Principal Fairbairn—religion is so natural to man that it is the simplest truth to say that he is by nature religious. “Religion is not a discovery or invention, due to art or artificial conditions. As well say that sight is a discovery and hearing an invention. Man saw because he had eyes, heard because he had ears—the sense created the sensation.” Hence, as this same thinker further remarks, man gets into religion as he gets into other natural things—his mother tongue, his home, and filial affections—spontaneously, without conscious effort. But to get out of it he has to “reason himself into a new and strange position, force his mind to live in a state of watchful antagonism towards its own deepest tendencies. No man is an atheist by nature, only by art, and an art that has to offer to nature ceaseless resistance.”

These remarks about religion are not meant for padding nor as mere stock-in-trade. We all know that the mental attitude we take to anything determines in a greater or lesser degree its effects upon us; how a man's view is

influenced by his point of view. It is not denied that we live by bread when it is said that we live not by bread alone. If your work on the production of a newspaper is simply your livelihood, as the word is usually understood, I can understand the position, and I have nothing to say about it. It is told of Mr. Moody, the evangelist, that, putting his hands on the shoulder of a young man who had strayed into the enquiry room, he said to him, "My young friend, are you saved?" "Saved!" was the answer of unaffected surprise. "Not I, I'm a reporter." Moody was shrewd enough to pass on. "No description," says Meredith, "is quite exhaustive." But this was an instance that came uncommonly near to it.

And yet, gentlemen, if you have what is called a soul above the technical and cash side of your profession—necessary as both are—then I of the pulpit, in the measure I have that same soul, salute you of the press as workers together for a higher end and good. We may not always agree what good is: sufficient for me if you believe there is good, for then I sweep you within the orbit of my present meaning in the use of the word religion. I cannot allow for a moment that the press and the pulpit have any necessary

relations to one another in a competitive sense. But I do say that they should have a great relation in a co-operative and sympathetic sense. If you will indulge me a word of "shop," I will remind you in this connection that the preacher has no competitor; he can have no rival.

Let me quote again a few words, and this time from Dr. Parker. I once heard him say in his own inimitable fashion: The preacher has a punctuation of his own, an emphasis of his own, a genius of his own; and the world will recognise it when it is there, and the world will respond. "The press is competing with the pulpit," we frequently hear it said. Why not, then, at your next meeting of this order, get some man who has nothing else to do to read a paper upon, "Is correspondence likely to put down conversation?" Would you rather have a postcard from your mother than a talk with her? The press has to do with print, the pulpit with talk—and talk which is not like anything else but itself. The soul talks, the face talks, the whole utterance talks; and you may deliver every word the preacher said, and yet leave out the talk. You may say, "These are his very words, I took them down at the time; these are his very

words." So they are, but they are not the talk. The music is left out, the explanatory tone, the illuminating smile, the masonic grip, the wooing accent, the warning note. And yet you have reported the very words!

If, therefore, there is imperative need and every reason why pressmen and preachers should be friends and not foes; if in any true sense we are comrades bound together in this high chivalry of warring for the right—what are our common dangers? And in asking this question I am conscious of a difficulty. I do not know what proportion of the company it is my privilege to address is responsible for the tone and policy of the various papers represented here. Assuming any part of it to be present, it must needs be small. Most of you, I imagine, have no more responsibility in this matter than I myself have. At the same time, I can hardly conceive of an intelligent man being on the staff of a newspaper and having no interest in it beyond that part which he contributes to the general content. And my conviction is that the danger of the press to-day is the danger of the pulpit: it is the danger of being bought. The real heresy of the age is its growing absorption in selfish getting. It is the gold that now sanctifies the modern temple. This is one principal reason

why we find it so hard to keep any hatred of some of the cruellest forms of injustice and wrong—we have too much vested interest in them. Hence we generalise our circumstances and our experiences; and this is our peril. A man's conscience counts for little unless its action can be made specific.

And I am afraid there is not too much room for conscience in journalism as we have it now. Hence, as in many other directions, we have almost come to smile at the word "principle," or "conscience," as applied to any pursuit that is meant to end in money. It has now a foreign sound in such a connection. Its use is relegated to the people whom we classify as cranks when it means nothing, and nuisances when it does. The newspaper of to-day is fast passing into the hands of that power of to-day known as the Syndicate. Every year, especially in the case of the press, we are leaving the best in the past, and adopting what is current in what are styled up-to-date ideas and methods. The catch-word of the times is "progress," which, being interpreted, means "every man for himself, and the fates take the hindmost." We are concentrating our brain, our energies, our resources on "trusts," "combinations," "monopolies." To be outside one of these has become a more or less

quick, but a sure way, to commercial and even ecclesiastical perdition.

And what is their all but inevitable working out, save to destroy individuality, crush private enterprise, and reduce, nay degrade, men to the position of mere ciphers, dependent for their economic value upon a money numeral that has neither a soul to save nor a body to kick! Who questions the effect of this on modern journalism? More and yet more is the newspaper becoming, not so much the organ of public opinion, not so much a medium to educate and influence that opinion in its better aspirations and larger outlook—not so much these as the active and protective side of the money interest it represents. It may not live to pay in itself so much as to help other things to pay at the awful cost of the community on which it preys. I can remember the days, as can some of you, when if we read an article in a newspaper we never doubted the good faith of the writer. We accepted it as the expression of his opinion—that, and not something else. It is not too much to refer to this as largely a thing of the past. The new progress in journalism has less place than ever for other than professional pens. Its opinions must be countersigned before they are reduced to print.

Whatever be the intrinsic morality of this, it has a side that is quite fair. If I pay a man to write what I want written and he is able and willing to write to order, it is so far a business transaction between us. And yet, that blessed word "business" does not quite exhaust such a barter. No man liveth unto himself. What about the public which reads what is written, and is influenced by it? We are sometimes told that it is easy to overrate this influence, and this may be true, but it is far easier to underrate it. It has often been remarked that print has a strange peculiarity of its own. An opinion, if expressed, may be dismissed as "nonsense"; if printed, accepted as sense. It is far less difficult for any Saul, however stupid he may be, to get among the prophets through print than it is by speech. People, almost as a whole, would rather have their opinions ready-made for them, especially on paper, than think them out for themselves. The hardest work in the world is to think; and where you have one man ready to bend his brain upon a matter you have fifty who flee from the task as the veriest devil with which they are acquainted. And yet, as a large proportion of this fifty consider it necessary to have some sort of opinion upon current events and questions, what more natural than that they should turn to their newspaper?

In this matter the newspaper press has a great opportunity and a high calling. And my complaint is that it is not always as faithful to that calling as it might be. The more reputable part of this press sets up, and rightly, a high standard of public morals. It claims the right, a right generally accorded, to criticise other institutions; and it does not readily weary of reminding the Churches of their shortcomings. I should be the last to resent this where it is obviously on the square. What I do resent is criticism that smells of the syndicate; pens at work on one column with a watchful eye upon the advertisements there are in another. Take the attitude of the average press to the man who stands for what many of us regard as the saving health of human society. How does the social reformer, the temperance enthusiast—the man who believes that there is a corporate humanity, with its laws, duties, and responsibilities—fare at the hands of this money-power behind the press? I have seen many a man driven out of public life, utterly broken in spirit, by the hireling pens of men who in their hearts sympathised with the man they had orders to crush.

There is, again, the growing element of sensationalism in the modern newspaper. This may

be quite a legitimate thing. Most things, I suppose, are sensational until we get used to them. Sensationalism may be but initiative; the challenge we offer, and have a right to offer, to the attention of the public. The end may not always justify the means to reach it; but to say what is or is not sensational in certain methods, we must know more than we often do know about motives. The danger of sensationalism comes in when, regardless of other considerations, it is simply used as the most effective means to a sinister or questionable end. If, in this connection, I indulge the amateurish remark that a newspaper must pay to live, I do it to deny the generally assumed corollary of this proposition that a newspaper must live—therefore it must pay. There is a previous question: Why must it live? The thief may say "I must live," and we answer, "That is by no means self-evident; but if live you do, we must see to it that you are as honest as we can compel you to be." And is the newspaper press the one estate in the realm which may claim to be exempt from the law that holds the realm together? We do not admit in the case of institution or man that, in order to live, whatever he does must pay.

It is this doctrine of pay to live, and live to

pay, which gives us a further position, and upon it I will devote a last word of criticism. The newspaper, we are told, must supply what its public will have. "If growl you must," you say to me, "go for those who have the determination of the matter in their own hands; fire off your anathemas upon our readers." But is there not more sound than substance in an apology of this order? I might, were it in my power, deliver from my pulpit to-morrow what is called an "epoch-making" utterance on some doctrine of religion, and not a newspaper represented here would report a line of it. But were I to enter the pulpit with a tall hat on, not a few people would know about it by Tuesday. Has the newspaper no responsibility for this almost universal indifference to a sensible word on one side, or its interest in an act of folly on the other? What the press has to a large extent made in public taste and sentiment it could do much to unmake. By paying a little less attention to what the people want, or imagine they want, and more to what they need, the newspaper could do wonders in turning the reading and thinking of the great public into directions which it so much needs to find.

It is the old story. In things human there appears to be no good without its neighbouring

ill, no gain without some loss to match. Our fathers fought for a cheap press. They said, and believed, that it would be one of the master-forces in righting wrongs and educating the people not only in the assertion of their rights, but in that which is of equal importance—the recognition of their duties. But one age often gives its best to win for a succeeding age what that succeeding age either ignores or turns to a perverted use. It has been so with a large part of the press. It helps to confirm and perpetuate in the nation institutions which, in the interests of humanity, those who freed the press meant it to destroy.

Let it be understood, gentlemen, that in the crude remarks I have had the hardihood to inflict upon you, I have attempted to observe the distinction there is between a part and the whole of the newspaper press. I yield to no man in my admiration and appreciation of the services of a well-conducted journal, whatever its side in politics or its opinions on questions that affect the Churches. I understand the province of a newspaper well enough not to expect it to be what the public in its fair aggregate does not desire it to be. But, all the same, I maintain that it is your business and ours to educate our masters. You have your opinion as

to the effect of sermons on the people who hear them, as we ministers have our opinion about the pabulum you provide day by day, and its apparent influence upon your readers. And, together, admitting that we have a serious purpose, we have to confront the fact that the moral currency after all this hearing and reading is not what it might reasonably be expected to be. People hear and read so much to-day that they neither read nor hear. The influence of reading on character used to be considerable, and ought always to be so. But it may be doubted whether reading to-day produces much effect upon character unless it be to make it more purposeless. The crowd of readers, so-called, does not want to know things; it only wants to know something about them. When Bacon said that reading makes a full man he did not foresee a day when it would also make an empty one.

That time has come, and the fear is that it has come to stay. And the Churches must accept their share—and it is a large one—for the mindless hearing and reading which are the despair of our day. If the Christian public would insist upon a high-toned and morally healthy press, we should have it. I do not mean a press that is so-called religious in its

mere content, and speaks the dialect of some sect. I mean a good secular newspaper in the true sense of the term; a newspaper that is essentially righteous in spirit and robust in tone. And the influence of such a press would speedily filter down to the masses of the people who, from want of education, taste, and moral discernment, now feed what should be their mind on the garbage of these gutter prints, which are as vile as they are numerous. I will not trust myself to try to express what I feel about them. They are as noisome to you as they are to me; these betting, gambling mediums; these filthy, leprous sheets that appeal, and appeal only, to whatever of latent blackguardism there is in that complex entity we call a human being.

Permit me now, gentlemen, to revert for a moment to type. Out of our past of struggle and aspiration we are nearer, as we trust, to what we conceive to be the light. God grant that it is no *ignis fatuus*, no dancing meteor of the marches, that we follow. "I remember," said a friend to me lately, "travelling amid exquisite scenery, under cloudless skies in warmth and sunshine along the banks of the Mediterranean, when a fellow-traveller, pointing to the cold snow that was gleaming on the peaks of

the Alps above us, said, 'That is to remind us that we are mortal.'" So, in spite of all our progress, we have chill prospects on many sides to tell us how little our vaunted progress may be worth; how thin, after all, is the veneer of our civilisation. We are making progress in things; are we at the same time making men? Our triumphs in physical science are written in marvels, turn where we will; but they are only means to an end—the achievement of worthy character and a rational happiness. Does much of our world, as we know it, look as if this were our end? Religion utters her voice, and science discovers to us its secrets, and even yet we turn from one in indifference and to the other as but an agent of our selfishness. And so the usual product of experience, as Dr. Martineau remarks, especially in attempting to make a better world, is a certain caution and lowering of hope. As we get on in years the precepts which most naturally flow from our lips express themselves in negatives. The disposition to trust in nothing which cannot be endorsed by a material success, is apt to grow upon us until we come to believe in nothing that cannot take out a policy of assurance.

I know with any man what this means; and if I intrude upon you, as I close, a word of

personal testimony I will ask you to listen to it, not from the preacher, but from the man. Had I my life to live again, and knowing what I do know of the fickle and thankless side of the multitude, I would enter the same arena; elect to fight the same fight for what I believe to be right against what I believe is wrong. If we were sent into the world for a higher purpose than to edge through it as sleek an existence as we can—then, while we are not called to success in that higher thing, we are called to do all we can to make it a success. The world needs nothing more; the great English-speaking race needs nothing so much as men who are inspired by the truth that ideals are realities, that imagination is seeing, and that scepticism about these things is not only ignorance, it is the root of the most deadly form of atheism. We have a right, I say again, to look to you pressmen to help us preachers to lead the nation forth to a nobler future without breaking the continuity of its history or abandoning the principles that have made it for the best it is. Suffer, gentlemen, this word of exhortation, said to myself as to you—Keep yourselves in this faith. Believe in God and humanity; for I hold it true with one who says that, as the outer world takes its meaning

from the soul, so the inner life takes its meaning from God, and, if that goes, all goes. We but vindicate our right to world-room when our life is the working expression of the fine old Hebrew creed: "Do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with thy God."

AD CLERUM

*An Address (with some additions) delivered at the Autumnal Assembly of the
Congregational Union of England and Wales, held in London, 1910*

“Is the Lord among us, or not?”

EXODUS xvii. 7.

XXII

AD CLERUM

“**I**S the Lord among us, or not?” I met these words, used as a quotation, in something I was reading a few months ago. I had read them before with no particular interest, as part of the narrative in which they occur. We often meet a line in a poet, or a sentence from a writer, which gives, as it were, body to the spirit of our thoughts. Read the same line or sentence at another time and in another mood, and we realise how true it is that we are our own literature, in the sense that we have to bring to the words of others very much of what we carry away from them. I was in no happy frame of mind about what is called the “Religious Outlook” when I stumbled across the words. They ask, and bluntly, what I was asking myself, it may be, in a faithless mood and hour.

We have been reminded lately that ours, too, is a day which the Lord hath made, and we are not to go back sighing for what we imagine were easier times, but to rejoice in the day we have. We have need to watch lest the more sinister sides of our day betray us into false witness against the good there is in it.

Nothing is more common than to hear it said of this evil and that wrong: "It was never so deep-rooted and widespread as it is to-day." Every age has said the same of its characteristic troubles, and every age has believed its own report. It may be, if we look at the gracious work being done—turn where we will, look at it in connection with prevailing modes of thought and social custom—that we shall find not a little to hearten and inspire. It may be, I think it will be seen to be, that a fair consideration of the facts will show a mighty work being wrought in rescuing and raising men from the dark and narrow life of self into the light and joy of the Kingdom of God. But there is another side, and it is no want of loyalty to our day to look at it, if that look be directed by a worthy motive. To attempt to explain away the comparative helplessness of the special work to which our religious agencies are committed is not faith;

it is not optimism. Where it is not moral insensibility, it is irony, and that cruelest form of it—the irony that mocks and hurts.

We have, as ever, the problems of personal life with us. The world with its enclosing atmosphere is all about us. It interpenetrates our minds, it leads us captive by its subtle influences. The devil is always there—and nowhere more so than in the preacher's study—with his strange lies and delusions; with his appeals to our indolence, to our false independence and stupid conceit. And these old temptations take fresh edge with the new circumstances. Ours is an age of hurry—commercially, socially, and intellectually. It is very difficult—one wonders if it were ever more so—to attain to that meditative calm and quietness in which our forefathers found no little of the strength of their religion. An age of hurry, I repeat, and the rush is largely for wealth as interpreted by money. “Ye that love the Lord,” says the psalmist, “hate evil.” That is next to impossible in our day; we have too much vested interest in it. The very word “evil” has come to have a foreign sound amid our current discussions and appeals to self-interest. We generalise our circumstances and experiences, and this is our peril.

Which means that the real and profound trouble of our age is the waning sense of the God-consciousness in our mind and heart. We are becoming not so much a class as a people, of whom it may be said, "There is no fear of God before their eyes." We sometimes try to get a little comfort by saying to ourselves, or hearing it said, that the masses of the people may not be religious according to our ideas of what religion should imply; but, at any rate, they are not atheists. For myself, I fail to see where the comfort comes in. If men were thinking themselves into atheism, paying its price of strain and sorrow, there would be hope. The man who *thinks* himself into this hell can use the same way to get out of it. The heart-break of our day is that God, with increasing multitudes, is not considered to be of sufficient importance for them to pay the toll of thought which is necessary before they can know whether they believe in Him or not. We have, as I remarked a minute ago, many admirable things in our modern world—religious sentiment, humanitarian feeling, willingness to help others, if it do not put an undue tax upon our time and means. But how much of it all, good as it is, is the reflex and legacy of the days of a sturdier faith? If we are only using up and

not adding to the nobler content of life, then we have need to ask ourselves very seriously, What is to be the living force of the future?

We have need to make all things wait until we have settled *what is it that for us is Fundamental*. And if this God-consciousness be not fundamental, what is? Our forefathers in the faith may have made God, as they conceived of Him, too stern. We talk of God as love, and we do well, but our talk seems to have lost out of it the consuming fire, the element of law. Who would gather from our public teaching of religion that there is any place left in it for fear? He was not in the habit of using words carelessly, who a little before his death made this bitter remark: "Nobody is afraid of God now." The Church of our day is making a terrible mistake in getting rid of hell; because, doctrines about hell apart, hell itself, or that which makes hell, is the first and worst and nearest of the facts of human life. Perfect love, we are told, casteth out fear. But that is not the fear which is, as I have before described it, the active and protective side of love, saving it from too easy morality, or an open licence. "The *fear* of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." If we love God we fear Him, with the fear which shows us what love is in the determinations of life.

Let us, then, bend our thoughts for a moment to the consideration of what this God-consciousness can do for us, when it lives in us, moves, and is our being. It is possible, as George Eliot says, to believe ourselves strong without feeling that we are strong. Do we *feel* what in our religious phraseology we speak of as being "sure of God"? For if we are sure of God nothing else is vital. We may have come to these Union meetings wondering almost whether the light that is in us be darkness; we shall leave them as in the radiancy of a vision, can we but put our immortal soul into the words as he did who said, "I know Him Whom I have believed." I need not try to particularise this trouble or that disappointment; every heart knoweth its own bitterness. But if our belief in God had in it a true grip of God, the happenings of life, while still the same, would lose their shadow-side of nervousness and fear. It would be the mystic chemistry which absorbs the mists of our anxieties and forebodings, and gives them back in sunshine of trust and confidence.

How, then, are we to make sure of God; to get the faith in Him which vitalises us, stirs our whole nature, and gives immortality to the distinctive principle within us which is reached

by its nature? If we would know God, we must make it possible for God to reveal Himself to us. He could not ask for less; we are not asked to give Him more. We must make it possible through what I may call the *natural part of us*. Much that has to do with the body must be nailed to the cross. And let me be understood. We are not the disciples of John the Baptist who came fasting, but of Him who came eating and drinking. Which means, if I understand it, that there is nothing which is good to have and enjoy which Christianity does not allow. But this said, let us make no mistake. Nothing is easier than to stretch the legitimate satisfaction of a natural craving into the region of mere indulgence. Many a man begins to take a little wine for his stomach's sake, soon to find himself taking a good deal for his appetite's sake. There is nothing easier, I say, than to find ourselves there; for there are few things harder to determine than the point where the right use of a thing ends and its abuse begins.

I do not think that any man can be sure of God whose conscience, if educated (and by educated I do not mean inflamed), is in a state of protest against some habit, or the nature of his self-permissions. No man can trifle with

his conscience over this matter and pray at the same time. He may say prayers, but he cannot pray while his soul laughs at him as a man whose words are towards the sky and his deeds in the dust. As a wise teacher puts it, "Some one self-indulgence may taint a multitude of noble qualities, not so much killing them as spoiling them of their fruits." One unguarded part of us will at a critical moment make our strength like water, and leave us nothing but the consciousness of ineffectual desires and the shame and bitterness of defeat. I have known ministerial failures, but I have only known two or three that had to be explained by utter want of gift; they have almost entirely had their roots in moral causes.

There are many things which, not intrinsically wrong in themselves, may not be right for us. God in Christ is the supreme sacrifice for the salvation of the world, and man's power with man is obedience to the same profound law. There is nothing men more esteem in a man than the moral self-mastery that can be attained only by a discipline to which they themselves are not willing to submit. And this victory is the most impressive, when the fight for it has been waged and won for a principle, a cause, or the claims of religion. We influence for good

those about us, not by being like to like, but so unlike as to make them feel the difference between that which is native to us all and that which is the gift of God in Jesus Christ. Let it be felt that in us such gifts as we have are adorned by grace, and emphasised in character, and the world which now neglects our message will be compelled to say, "These men do more than others"; and it will be constrained to ask, "What is their secret?" When a minister, whose conscience is not at ease over some self-permission, answers his conscience, "I will not lose the man in the parson," we may, so far, write him out of the call of the Cross. Just as self-indulgence gets hold of the *man*, vain will it be to seek in him for the parson worth the finding. We are told of a place in the life of the late Charles Bradlaugh where he had all but resolved to defy the world about him over a matter that the world does not forgive. A friend pointed out to him that such a course would put into the hands of his enemies the one weapon they could most effectually use against the "Free-Thought Movement." And Bradlaugh answered, "There is nothing I could not crush out of my life as easily as with this fist I could crush an egg-shell, if I thought it would injure the work I am trying to do." And if he said

this, and did it, not to win a crown for himself, but for what he held to be the truth he had to proclaim, what manner of persons ought we to be, who claim to have both commission and character to sustain our appeal to men in Christ's stead, "Be ye reconciled to God"? Could we say of any temptation to self-indulgence which would imperil our highest efficiency, "We can crush it out of our life, as with our fist we could crush an egg-shell," our message would get its irresistible setting; and our preaching would take its regal place as a regenerative force in our modern world.

Much that is natural must go on the altar; and much of what, for the sake of expression, I may call *mental*. It has not been said for nothing that the mental attitude we take to anything determines in a greater or less degree its effects upon us. Take reading as a suggestive example. I do not exaggerate when I say that scores of young fellows have come to me in the course of my ministry to tell me that they have lost their faith, and must sever their connection with the Church. And the reason, when I have been able to get at it, has not infrequently been this—they have read themselves out of the faith on the one side, without being able, assuming that they have

made an effort, to read themselves back on the other.

It is my opinion, and I only ask you to accept it for what it is worth, that many of us ministers are in danger of doing the same thing. We like to tell ourselves that our reading is "up-to-date." But what date is that? It is a perilous thing to make up our calendar from every last book unloaded upon us by this critic and that sceptic. Nor should we overlook the fact that, for the most part, we are men of average gifts and education. We have not had the special training, and we have not the time, to be students enough in the technical sense of the word to meet these experts on their own ground. Surely there should be some sensible correspondence between the things we read and our equipment to handle them.

I was talking some time ago with a Glasgow minister who himself is a writer of books and one of the most useful and honoured men in the city. From an incidental reference to a certain *Review*, I asked him if he had seen an article in a recent number. He answered "No; I used to read the *Review*, but I dropped it. I found that I was not getting from it what compensated me for the disturbing influence it left in my mind." It was the admission, and

it was the testimony of a man who knew the things that belonged to his peace; and those who knew him would be the last to associate his peace with that of the grave. And if many of us would put our mind—the more strenuously the better—into a single year's reading on the more constructive and devotional side of our message and calling, reading with time to think and pray, we should be surer than I am afraid many of us are at present about our answer to the question: "Is the Lord among us, or not?"

There is need for a few plain words about this apotheosis of mind, or what we are pleased to call reason, especially in our teaching of religion. It is our danger, as ministers of the Free Churches, who have to undertake week by week an output of talk which may well explain not a little of the folly and heresy of which many of us are guilty. We are suffering, and our people are suffering, from a debauch of talk that almost inevitably shapes itself into an apologetic deference to brains that are not there, and to doubts that have next to no existence. In this nervousness about the reason the heart is all but ignored, and yet we are told that it is with the heart that man believeth unto righteousness. It may

sound formidable to tell us that "authority cannot keep alive what reason dooms to death." It depends what we put in or take out of the terms. I, in my day, have heard what was accepted as reason doom to death many things that are living yet, and will live while the human heart is what it is. In this connection I should like to repeat an oft-quoted remark. Robert Louis Stevenson was not a man who said better than he knew, but he never uttered himself with finer insight than he did when he wrote these words: "There is something in a man's heart more trustworthy than any syllogism." And for those of us who are yet in bondage to that ancient make-believe called "Modern Thought," let me supplement Stevenson's word with another from perhaps the most powerful mind which, in recent years, has chosen the form of the novel as its medium of expression. "Who," he asks, speaking of Christianity and as a sceptic, "that knows something of the coalesced fury and mockery of the talent of Europe—wits, scholars, politicians, satirists, poets—would dare to hope that any religion could survive a criticism so destructive? We lift our eyes from their pages and look around for a ruin. But there she stands, the Christian Church! There the flame

burns on, mystic, infallible, intangible as light, indestructible as adamant." Yes, there she stands, the only institution in the world which is seeking to bring down and incarnate the truth that if the world is to be saved we must do more than reform it, we must be workers together with the Son of God to redeem it. If Gibbon and Voltaire, Herbert Spencer and Strauss, have left the essential verities for which the Church stands where they were, we may leave modern thought to deal as best it can with the truth so well put by Arthur Hugh Clough :—

“ Ah ! yet, when all is thought and said,
The heart still overrules the head.”

Then, once more, if we would be sure of God, all of self that ends with self must also be nailed to the cross. And by this I mean what I say, although I do not know how to say what I mean. Our reason shuts us up to the notion that if there is a personal Deity He must be an infinitely perfect Being; and our theology, practical and speculative, must be in harmony with this general assumption. I do believe in a personal Deity Who, in Jesus Christ, is revealed to us in terms of

human experience. I believe, with David Livingstone, that He knows His own mind about me, and I am not going to worry about that. My sole concern is to learn by obedience what that mind is, and make it my own. In other words, I pray to be in very deed what I am by conviction—a God's fatalist. "God is well," says the Christian Scientist, "so are you." I prefer to say to myself, and to every man, "Be true to the Divine within thee, and to thee all life will become Divine."

We may have to be this at times, as though destitute of every conscious element of inclination, of wish, or desire. It may have to be an endurance of bare, cold, icy determination to let God work in us all His will. But trust in Him though He slay us, and we receive the touch of omnipotence. We are not held responsible for our gifts, but for the use of them. We are not asked to trouble about our reputation, it is character that makes sure. We are not called to success in our work, but to the work; do it faithfully and the success is in safe keeping.

Let there be no yielding to ease, doubts, or the unworthy sides of life; let us keep back consciously no part of the price, and victory in all things worth winning shall be as cer-

tain as only God can make it. Great changes are at hand in the Church and in those conditions of life we call Social. It may be in the years that lie immediately before us that the Church is going to be smaller, but that does not mean that the Church will be less powerful. It may be the beginning of a new condition of power. We ministers must accept our share—and I am afraid it is a large one—of responsibility for the waning of the God-consciousness in the mind and heart of our day. But by God's undeserved grace it is yet within our power to bring it back. Make sure of God in the only begotten Son of God, and men will never mistake the Christ in us. All men are commanded by that surrender to Him which has been won at the Cross; which makes it true when we say, "The love of Christ constraineth us."

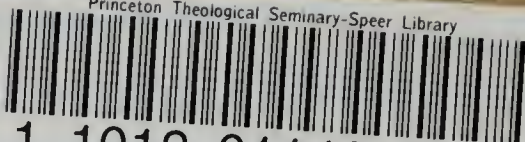
When the Church of the Eternal Wisdom of Constantinople was captured by the hosts of Islam and turned into a Mosque, the great mosaic figure of the Christ enthroned in glory over the east was defaced and blotted out with paint. But as the years went by the imperishable mosaic wore, as it were, its way through the fading veil, and the calm face once more looked down on those who bowed

beneath. Even so has the face of the Gospel of the Son of God been marred by the folly, the apathy, and the errors of His disciples.

What of ourselves? Has this commonplace belief in God, which is a very miasma in our Churches to-day, its explanation in the old adage, "Like priest, like people"? Dare we pledge ourselves in this assembly, brother to brother, that never again shall the world doubt, however it may debate, the triumph in our answer to the question, "Is the Lord among us, or not?" Let us be willing in the day of His power, and Christ's kingdom shall move on towards its saving purpose in the Divine will done on earth as in heaven. For the evolution of man and of the world is but the clearer and completer affirmation of Him Who was in the beginning with God, and in Whom dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.

The Gresham Press,
UNWIN BROTHERS, LIMITED,
WOKING AND LONDON

Princeton Theological Seminary-Speer Library



1 1012 01146 1011

